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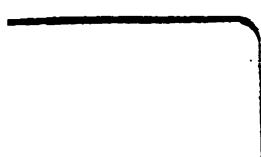
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SIR RICHARD ESCOMBE

MAX PEMBERTON





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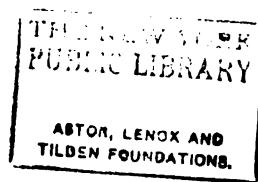
A. B. Miller

To
Max Matheron



New York and London
1909







[See p. 47]

"I LOVE YOU DICK"



1930-1931. The following is a list of the members of the

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Max Scherzer

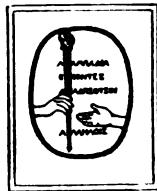


Max Scherzer
President

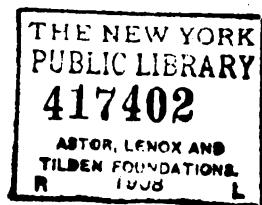


Sir
Richard Escombe
A Romance

By
Max Pemberton



Harper & Brothers Publishers
New York and London
1908



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Published June, 1908.

Some pages from the life story of Sir Richard Escombe, Bart., particularly concerning his relations with the notorious Society of St. Francis, as founded at Medmenham Abbey, on the River Thames, by Sir Francis Dashwood and John Wilkes; of the manner in which he brought that society to an end; also of his relations with Kitty Dulcimore, of Sherbourn, in the county of Warwickshire; of the misfortune which befell him when he drew her name in the lottery; of his subsequent service at Windsor Castle. The whole giving a true account of certain social practices in the reign of George II. and of a club but ill remembered in the present day, though entitled to perpetual obloquy.



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The Author's Foreword

THIS is the story of the club at the ruined Medmenham Abbey, and, so far as it may be told to modern ears, a true account of that famous society.

Many visit Medmenham in our day. There is no fairer country than that which lies between Henley and Marlow town. But the true history of that ancient foundation is known to but few.

Viewed as we may view it, an inn thrust against its walls, the great pillars crumbling to dust, ivy twined about its stately but glassless windows, it is difficult to cast the imagination back to those tempestuous days of Sir Francis Dashwood and John Wilkes, of Churchill and of Ailsa; of the poet Whitehead and that rascally voluptuary Frederick Lord Harborne. Yet all these lived and played their part at Medmenham. Those silent courts have resounded to the patter of women's feet. Hall and refectory have glowed with lights. The high-road we follow and name so solitary has glittered with the gauds of gallant and of courtier, has witnessed the beginning and the end of many a disgraceful pageant when George II. was King. To-day the abbey is but a name, yet it is but little more than a hundred and fifty years since these things were done, since Sir Richard rode down from Windsor and Kitty's coach was stopped at the cross-roads in the lane.

We have created a river life since those days. The

The Author's Foreword

Thames is much even to the twentieth century. Clubs arise on every hand. The Blues to-day drive over from Windsor to the vales below Hambledon and, it may be, have a poor title to accuse their forefathers. There is no prettier thing in modern life than the water pageant, none so readily acknowledged at the zenith of the summer. But that which is changed is the fundamental notion of a man's honor and of the price he must pay to defend it.

Who in our time would put a pistol to his head because the rule of an infamous club demanded that he should do so?

The laws of Medmenham, read aloud to a modern company, would provoke but ribald laughter or pity for the men whose wit had framed them. And yet, in justice to that fine old liberator, John Wilkes, we must remember that such a society as that of St. Francis would not have endured a single day but for the rigor of the rule which its founders had ordained.

When they decreed that a man must die for a word to the woman whom another protected, marriage was named as a mock alternative hardly to be thought of in such an atmosphere. Contemplate such a dandy as Lord Ailsa whispering of church and parson to the singer from the opera in whose honor he had proposed a toast! What the society demanded above all else was such a modicum of order within its walls as should avert a public scandal and keep out George and the unwelcome dragoons. This it could not preserve, despite its laws. A fine sense of honor, difficult as it may be for us to understand, was as a precious possession to every man of the age. It forbade the success of that mock ritual which might well govern a similar society in our own time. *Fay ce que voudras*—as the motto stands over the abbey door to-day and may be read by all who pass by—that could prevail only when honor was all to those who

The Author's Foreword

caroused within, when for honor's sake men would lay down their lives without one thought of the truth or falsity of the creed which thus compelled them.

There was published in London, some hundred years ago, a novel called *Chrysal; or, the Adventures of a Guinea*. This purported to give a true account of the revels at Medmenham and of the scandals associated with the famous social fraternity. It does not appear to have done anything of the kind. A close analysis of such records as exist—and they are few enough—these and a just appreciation of the spirit of the age make it perfectly clear that the author knew nothing whatever of Medmenham Abbey as Sir Francis Dashwood and John Wilkes re-established it, and less of the ceremonies taking place within its walls.

That these were an open mockery of established religious faith does not appear, nor in fairness to the Society of St. Francis may we assume any such thing. It has not been assumed in this story of Sir Richard Escombe, nor, I may hope, implied. The men seem to have been mere jesters, but clever jesters. The mock habit was not assumed in hostility to any creed or in burlesque of it, but as a jest in keeping with much else done within those hoary walls. Perchance if the whole truth were written there are clubs to-day as little worthy of public approval as the famous club at Medmenham. The manner changes, but man is eternal. What honor was to Richard Escombe, social applause is to many in our own time. We carouse in palaces, asking no ivy to stand sentinel. The current of a swift life passes where the old river used to flow. And if Time does indeed give glamour to that which is least worthy to shine, at least the pages of the old romance may carry some truth which this generation may read with profit.



Book 3
Of Love but not of Marriage



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Sir Richard Escombe

I

UPON THE ROAD TO WARWICK



IT would be very proper, I suppose, to begin the history of Sir Richard Escombe, baronet, with some account of his ancestry, both English and Irish; to tell you of Castle Escombe, in the county Meath, and of Moreton Fell, in Cumberland, the homes that have sheltered him; to speak of his doings at St. James's and afterward at the French court; to depict him in the habit of a squire and a soldier, and by no means to neglect some particulars of that notorious blackguard, Brian Escombe, whom he had called grandfather when George I. was King. If I do none of these things, pass by matters so profound, let their inconsequence be my excuse. His forebears do not interest me. The man himself shall be my study.

Now, I could show you mad Sir Richard in many places for our beginning, but for some of these I have no love at all, and of others I know nothing. So here's a good excuse for bringing you at once to the good county of Warwickshire



Escombe

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he now crossed the Avon.
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s a feed at the inn?" he had just

Sir Richard Escombe

and setting you down upon a windy night of March, in the year 1746 of our Lord, where you shall see Sir Dick as he was and follow him up the winding drive to Mr. Dulcimore's house, and the somewhat remarkable experience that was to befall him there.

There are many who know the road; many who cross the seas to ride it in our own day. Sherbourn of the Vale lies little more than a mile from the great keep at Warwick. The whole glory of the woods and meadows of Shakespeare's country is reflected round about it. Here in the thickets we may still hope to espy Bottom, the weaver, and Flute, who mended the bellows. There are inns enough upon the road to shelter old Jack and his ragamuffins—vast kitchens for merry wives; cellars whence came the sack—all the substance, the simplicity, the red-cheeked fulness of England's yeomen unchanged and unchanging through the years. Here the Avon winds amid the graves of the living dead. Here is the greenwood-tree beneath which many a lad has tuned his merry throat—assuredly to no sweeter note than you may hear to-day should fortune carry you to the heart of Warwickshire and unlock her secrets for you.

You would not make the journey as Sir Richard Escombe made it. That goes without saying. For what wise traveller would choose the month of March for such a visit, and what freak of travel would bring him to Avonside when a bleak east wind was blowing and a moonless night watched him upon his way? Sir Richard, a nomad from the crown of his curly head to the proud toes of his high leather boots, might well delight in the very circumstance which the mere sight-seer would reprobate. With but one clear idea had he ridden from Chester to Warwick. The same impulsive notion carried him down the vale to Sherbourn. And there

Sir Richard Escombe

he stood at the gate, as much lost for an excuse, it would seem, as old Dulcimore himself after his third bottle of claret.

Let it be confessed at once that this would have been no surprise to Dick Escombe's friends—that is, to such as misfortune had left him. The same hot impulse which now carried him to old Anthony Dulcimore's house had achieved many a folly since they hunted him from his regiment, declared him a danger to the peace of any debauched community, and sent him headlong to the French King's court.

His very presence in England this night might have been named as a new affront to justice and the Parliament—for did not a hundred tongues tell you that he had marched to Derby some three good months ago, and had not gossip been over-ready to name him among the most notorious of those who had raised the Pretender's standard at Glenfinnan? If gossip lied, she was but practising a pretty habit and one with which she could not be unfamiliar. None cared to ask whether the rumor were true or false. None, certainly, would have believed that Sir Richard Escombe, baronet, would be mad enough to show himself here on the road to Warwick at such a time.

Yet here he was, none the less. Look a hundred yards down the road and you shall see that incorrigible rogue, Barry Michigan, who would have crossed the Styx for Dick Escombe's sake as readily as he now crossed the Avon. Barry already had taken his flute from his pocket and would pipe a stave. This must be a weary hour of waiting. You could not deceive Barry Michigan—he knew the tale too well.

“Will I give the horses a feed at the inn?” he had just asked his master.

Sir Richard Escombe

"What are you thinking of, Barry?" Sir Dick had replied. "I am going but to peep at their door."

"Sure, your honor, I can count the quarters on the church clock yonder."

"Barry, Barry—would you have me pass the house that shelters Kitty Dulcimore?"

"I'd have ye pass any house but your own."

"And this house full of soldiers, Barry—I do believe I'm the biggest fool in Europe this night."

Barry did not dissent.

"I've no head for figures, master—but ye might not be so much out of the reckoning."

He took his flute from his pocket, linking a bridle rein to each arm and posing for an air. Sir Richard regarded him, amazed.

"Heaven and my soul! would ye be piping me in, Barry? Have ye no discretion, then?"

"Ay, master, they'll hear of your coming soon enough. I'll be there at the hanging with the 'Death of Ould Mornay.'"

Sir Richard said nothing. How could he fling a stone of speech at Barry Michigan? Certainly it was folly to be there; but not as Barry imagined it to be. This new thought quickened his step and sent him briskly to old Dulcimore's gate. He opened it, fearing the challenge of its crazy hinges, passed up the white drive, came suddenly to a full view of the house—and then stood very still. A mad visit—he had known it from the first.

The house which old Anthony Dulcimore occupied at Sherbourn stands no longer, but did it do so it would call for little remark. Just a long, low, two-storied building which would have done well enough for the vicar or doctor

Sir Richard Escombe

of the parish—a rose garden sloping to the river's bank; considerable stables upon the right hand, a high brick wall enclosing an orchard upon the left, a short double drive before it and a modest porch for its chief adornment—these Sir Richard made a note of at a single glance. Be sure, at the same time, that he cared nothing for houses, nor would a palace have delayed him that night an hour upon the road. He had turned aside that he might see little Kitty Dulcimore again—perhaps change a word with her concerning his fortunes. And here, at Sherbourn, through the blindless window, he saw her, standing high upon a stool, red-coats all about her and their admiration not very far removed from the scene.

A hunting man would have said that they were asking her to sing a catch of the coverts; Sir Dick observed but this, that she was laughing loudly, while an old friend of his, Captain Beddoe, called for silence, and another old friend, Captain Rupert, for a song. A proper moment for a man who loved her to arrive! Sir Richard, honest always with himself, uttered no fool's talk of make pretence or dreams. “Twas always a little devil for the music,” he said to himself, but he said it very sourly none the less.

Now, could you have put a cool head upon Dick's shoulders—an article of furniture not commonly found across the Irish Channel, and unprovided, it would seem, by the gentle lady of Moreton Fell whom he had called mother—could you have done this you would have held a gallant soul to the spot that he might have heard the words of little Kitty's song and, perhaps, have derived some comfort from them.

As it was, he did nothing of the kind, but fell to pacing the gravelled path as full of thoughts of war as ever

Sir Richard Escombe

the Malooney boys had been upon the morning of a fair.

What right had Kitty to be among such fellows? True, he himself had often sung a catch with them when he wore King George's coat and had the right to go in debt for it. Every bit a man, he could grant no such privilege to Kitty. She was but nineteen, and should have known better. Logic forbade him, at the same time, to ask by what right he posed as *arbiter elegans* in her case. Was he her acknowledged lover—the outcast, the exile who had had his uniform stripped from his back? Devil a bit of it! Had he written to her from France? Not a line, upon his honor! Had he news of her—asked for news? He was ashamed to remember how rarely he had heard or asked it. And yet no sooner had he come to England than the mention of her name could send him riding from Chester like a Muscovite, turning aside on the most foolish of pretexts and pacing this hard and stony path like any criminal in a court-yard at Newgate. A mad visit—he had known it from the first.

And should he ride on without a word? Should he tell her the news or keep it back? There might be trouble enough among those hot-headed fellows, fresh from the table, he would swear, and not unwilling to return to it—trouble enough if he came in among them and asked if any remembered Captain Dick. He knew not what to do. Far down the road he heard the strains of Barry's flute.

And, as the clear heaven above him bore witness, no man could have mistaken those for the plaint of any nightingale.



II

WHAT HAPPENED AT ANTHONY DULCIMORE'S HOUSE

HERE are two long and narrow rooms upon the left-hand side of the porch as you enter the manor at Sherbourn, and it was in the second of these that Kitty Dulcimore related in song the story of the First Royal Dragoons, whose motto, as all the world knows, is taken from the Latin and signifies, "Let us be judged by our deeds," or "*Spectemur agendo*," as the school-masters would have it.

Granted that it would have been more than ungracious to have put such a fine precept to the proof upon such an occasion, had you judged His Majesty's Dragoons out of their own mouths this night you would have formed but a poor opinion of them.

Perhaps in the end your better judgment would have excused them, and you would have remembered their march three months ago from London to Derby after the Bonnie Prince Charlie; how thence they had been sent to Warwick to keep order in the western counties—and now, after three of the dullest months that such fine fellows could remember, they were to return to-morrow to London and the South.

For their commander, the most noble, the most exalted,

Sir Richard Escombe

the most persevering blackguard in the three kingdoms, Frederick Lord Harborne, of noble memory, there were honors awaiting and to spare.

Some said that German George had made him Governor of Windsor Castle; others named him for an earldom. Some would tell you aside that a less agreeable climate and one made much of by the parsons would suit him better, but that Honor would receive him on the threshold no man doubted. And this was the more extraordinary when we remember how little he had done; figuring with merit neither in the North nor in the Midlands; hunting out but few Jacobites for all his pains, and returning with so few trophies of the politically slain that the pamphleteers already had made merry over it. For this the regiment cared nothing at all. They were returning to London—what else mattered!

And so, I say, it would have been a cruel business to judge them out of the mouths of their motto-loving forefathers. Why, such a standard would have paralyzed the half of them. *Spectemur agendo!* Was not Major, the Marquis of Repton, as fine a fellow as Nottinghamshire could show you, already nodding by the window-seat, as well primed with good liquor as a doctor with bad Latin? And look at the most noble one in the first of the rooms, Frederick my Lord of Harborne, the Colonel of the First, hatchet-faced and sour—a damning hectic cheek to accuse him and a glassy look in his roving eye. *Spectemur agendo*, be sure, is no good to such as these, whatever it might do for the younger men. They would much sooner be judged to-morrow morning.

But we are forgetting Kitty, and Kitty, as we must solemnly bear witness, will not suffer herself to be long forgotten, whatever the circumstances. Is she not a Celt of the Celts,

Sir Richard Escombe

and does she not possess more than a Celtic vivacity? It is true that she has been long in England—so long that she has almost forgotten old Anthony Dulcimore's estates in county Down and the bigoted Cromwellism by which her forefathers obtained them. But even German George's soldiers cannot rob her of that priceless birthright, the determination never to be serious when she can be merry, and always to be merry when she should be serious.

All the traditions of Sherbourn record the story of Kitty's merriment upon that memorable occasion. Her immediate cavaliers were, we find, no others than the redoubtable and inseparable comrades, Captain Rupert and Captain Beddoe—generally known as “the twins”—fierce-mouthed warriors both, but in Kitty's presence as gentle as cooing doves. For her sake had they (to some reasonable extent) spared themselves the liquor; for her sake they stood upon either side of a crazy chair, while Kitty, mounted thereon, recounted in verse a true history of the circumstances under which the Royal Dragoons had come to Warwick. And this is the measure of it—in imitation, as it would appear, neither of the sonnets of William Shakespeare nor of the thunderous eloquence of Master Milton—but merely of a soldier's catch and the rol-de-tol-lol which then accompanied the same.

*The sojers came to Avonside,
All on a rainy morning.
They hunted for Charlie far and wide,
All on a rainy morning.
And the sergeant, he says, “What I see
Of the beautiful girls in this fair country,
'Tis shoulder arms, my boys,” says he,
All on a rainy morning.*

Sir Richard Escombe

Kitty sang *sotto voce*, the Marquis keeping time with his head, the poet Whitehead with his feet. Evidently there was no great desire upon the part of this amiable company that the lilting refrain should be overheard by the Colonel—the most noble one—in the adjoining room, nor by old Mrs. Dulcimore, Kitty's mother, whose tongue would have shamed the prophet Jeremiah. So it came about that both song and applause were duly measured, and even the poet's rhapsodies were but the mutterings of a whisper.

"A positive divinity," said he; "a shining light of song in a morass of silence."

But Captain Rupert, foolishly enough, and desiring another verse, said, quite inanely:

"Gentlemen, pray silence for Miss Dulcimore."

"Silence for the Queen of Song!" Whitehead repeated after him.

"Song—song—song"—from many voices.

Little Ensign Willoughby, more timid than the others, now chimed in with his "hush."

"I believe the Colonel has come back," he exclaimed, in a solemn whisper.

Kitty was much alarmed at this.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "if the great man were to see me now!"

It was a sympathetic utterance, and the men about her understood it but too well. For three months had these fears been very real, if but rarely expressed. Kitty was but nineteen years old, it is true, but no woman of thirty could have understood Frederick Viscount Harborne better.

"Oh, if the great man were to see me!"

"If he did," cried Rupert, very gallantly, "the light would

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blind him. Which is to say that he's been blind for a month, eh, Beddoe?"

The "twins" invariably appealed to each other when any point of controversy arose, and as invariably gave each other rude answers.

"I object to these childish remarks," exclaimed Captain Beddoe upon this occasion, to which Rupert retorted:

"As a child yourself, you ought to know."

"That is very personal, Rupert."

"Please to set a good example, Beddoe."

And so on and so on, while from his corner Major Repton, still nodding his head, although the music had long ceased, clamored incoherently for another verse.

"I would sooner listen to the east wind in a cellar than to you two at an argument," he exclaimed, blandly. "Hold your tongues and let Miss Kitty sing to us."

"But I only know thirty-nine verses," rejoined Kitty, sweetly.

"In which case, my dear girl, we'll-sing-'em-all-twice," said the Marquis at a breath.

How far this alarming programme would have been carried out, or what would have been the natural end of the dispute between the amiable Beddoe and the equally amiable Rupert, this history is not permitted to tell. We may hazard much, but the plain truth is just this, that Mrs. Dulcimore herself, a very Antiope, Queen of the Amazons, as Repton called her, entered the room at the moment, and away went all their plans like leaves before the blast. The first shot fired at Dettingen had not produced a greater hush. Even the Major fell dumb, merely screwing up his eyes to ascertain, if that might be, whether one lady or two had intruded so inauspiciously.

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Mrs. Dulcimore, be it said, paid little regard to that which was going on about her. She had caught the hatchet-faced Colonel by the lapel of his coat, and great were her loquacious opportunities. He, tortured as Prometheus on the rock, wished her where good manners forbade him to say. He had been thanking her for the hospitality shown to some of his officers during the regiment's enforced stay at Warwick, and graciously enough he did it, we must admit.

"My dear lady," he would say, "it had to be sometime—we could not stay here forever, and your hospitality would have known no bounds."

"No hospitality of mine, be sure of it," she retorted, afame with the fury of her speech. "My husband says, 'We must have the officers at the house,' and who was I to contradict my husband? Ah, Lord Harborne, if ye knew what anxieties Mr. Dulcimore gives me—with him apologizing to every houghty-toughty man he meets, his running after the friends of this great person and the other, and bringing them to me house whether I want them or no—eh, I'd be no worse off a widow, and better perhaps."

The great man heaved a profound sigh—his eyes were turned toward the place where Kitty stood; he spoke almost as one in a dream.

"Courage, dear lady," he said, "your desires may yet be gratified."

Antiope did not hear him. The blood of speech fired her tongue, and she raced on like a hurricane.

"And my dear daughter Kitty to marry. There's a responsibility for you. Now, would ye think to look at her that she's the blood of Irish kings in her veins? Yet 'tis true, as all the country knows. The great Brian Boru, he

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was her father many times removed. Ye'd never think it, no, but there it is—and such a responsibility I cannot sleep at night for it. Ah, what a wife she'd make for a rich man, an English nobleman, one that the King delights to honor and our dear Church to smile upon. You've never looked at Kitty as I look at her, Lord Harborne. Ah, who'd be thinking that we spent two hundred pounds upon her at a school in London—two hundred pounds, as I'm a living woman."

Harborne knew not what to say. Somewhere behind his steely eyes a grin was lurking. He had known many cities and many men—but that an old woman, this she-cat of Sherbourn, as he would call her playfully, should talk to him of marriage—at his time of life, too—occurred to him to be as fine a thing as ever William Wycherly had conceived or Mistress Peg had done for the delight of the groundlings.

"My dear lady," he stammered, "would you spoil such a native flower of innocence in a hot-house?"

"Ah, but my dear lord, what is woman born to if not to love and marriage? And ye see 'tis our hope—"

"I beg your pardon," exclaimed the Colonel, a happy expression suddenly crossing his sour face, "but do not I hear your husband's voice?"

He had raised his voice purposelessly, and silence fell again upon the room. Certainly there was some one in the hall, and he had something to say—in a weak voice, but an earnest one. The company pricked its ears, its excitement undisguised, its expectation considerable. As for old Mrs. Dulcimore, she could hardly contain herself.

"'Tis Mr. Dulcimore, surely," cried she, "and bringing news from Chester or he's an ijiot."

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But Kitty said:

“News from Chester! Oh, how welcome!”

They say that the company looked glum enough at this, and my Lord Harborne in particular wore so black a brow that even the lamps must blink at it. Kitty did not care twopence for that. Why should she? Had it not been rumored that the steeplechase at Chester might be won by Sir Richard Escombe’s horse, Wild Rose? If Dick had entered the brute, she knew he could not lose. That was where the shoe pinched. A pretty thing, said the soldiers, if a dishonored traitor might race a horse and rob honest men of their money. They were still thinking about it when old Anthony Dulcimore entered the room and at once confessed the truth.

“Lord Harborne, gentlemen,” he began, “I must offer you my apologies; pray, pray do not disturb yourselves—Marquis, Captain, be at your ease.”

“We are, I assure you,” replied the Marquis, who could not have stood upon his legs for a hundred, “quite at our ease, Mr. Dulcimore.”

“Did you ever hear such a man!” Mrs. Dulcimore chirped in, “and all the company waiting to hear who won the race at Chester yesterday.”

“My dear—I apologize—riding in this very moment—having been unable to get the news at Warwick, what should happen to me but that I meet an Irishman upon the road, and says he, ‘Glory be to God, but Wild Rose won it, and the man who rode her was Sir Richard Escombe, no other, though I be put to the torture for saying it.’”

Here was a hot shot to fire in among such a party: Had you told the soldiers that Dick was up the chimney waiting for them to pull him down you could not have astonished

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them more. Escombe in England—with a price upon his head! Escombe riding before the company at Chester, just as though nothing had happened these three months past! Impossible and preposterous! They would not hear it! Kitty alone found eloquence to greet an occasion so amazing. Never was a more joyous voice heard at Sherbourn.

“Captain Dick,” she cried, leaping down from her throne, “I knew it—Lord Harborne—my wager—this instant, sir—this instant!”

His lordship bowed low.

“I will lay my offering at your feet!” cried he.

“But I don’t wear gloves on my feet at all—and ye see, ‘twas Dick’s horse that I told ye would be winning—Captain Dick, Captain Dick!”

“Kitty, Kitty!” cried Mrs. Dulcimore, “to be speaking like this of a man who is no better than a highwayman! Has the girl lost her senses?”

Harborne shrugged his shoulders—a French touch and prettily ironical.

“The enthusiasms of youth are delightful,” said he, *sotto voce*. “I love to see them rise and wither. Be advised by me, madam. Name this man for a scoundrel and she will make of him a hero—but name him for a hero, you understand, and the scoundrel will soon be at hand.”

“Ye speak truth, my lord,” said the old lady, “and yet ‘tis difficult to tell Kitty as much. If Sir Richard Escombe, indeed, is come to England, then God help us all.”

“If he has come to England,” rejoined Harborne, dryly, “and will also oblige me by riding into Warwick, then I will undertake to place him in forty-eight hours where even Mrs. Dulcimore will be sorry for him.”

The news had greatly excited him—so much we must

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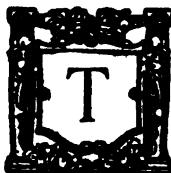
admit. A shrewd head perceived the possibilities very clearly. He would have given half his fortune to have laid this man Escombe by the heels. Had not the fellow publicly thrashed him on the Mall? His nerves twitched at the memory. His sagacity reminded him that there was no folly so outrageous that Richard Escombe might not be guilty of it.

"I must ride over to my quarters," he said, a few minutes later; "I must hear the news for myself. Major Repton will preside in my absence—for I should wish your husband to be with me, Mrs. Dulcimore. This may suit us both very well. My dear lady—it might be a night of good-fortune surpassing our hopes."

And so, indeed, it proved to be—but of that you shall hear in the chapter to come.

III

IN WHICH IS RECORDED THE AMAZING HISTORY OF THE LOTTERY



THE Colonel rode away to Warwick and the five officers immediately adjourned to that ancient room known as the "oak parlor," there to drink a glass of whiskey punch, without which life would have been but a shadow and existence but a mockery.

It is true that they had dined very comfortably at four o'clock, had taken a dish of tea with Kitty and her mother afterward, played a modest hand at whist, and listened to the sweet music of a harp. But a day which had no whiskey punch at its tail would have been like a hunt without a fox to it—and be sure old Dulcimore's hospitality forbade any such tragedy.

So it came to pass that a very altar to Bacchus had been set up in the "oak parlor." Whiskey and rum and lemons, long pipes for those who would smoke them; snuff for those who would not; high-backed chairs and a roaring fire leaping up the chimney—what more might mortal man ask for? Such luxury was almost enough to make them wish that they were not going back to London to-morrow. When that doleful vein passed—and they had toasted the King—then they began to talk of Harborne and his absence.

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"Here's luck to old Nobbs!" cries Captain Beddoe—for "Nobbs" was the name by which the regiment knew its colonel.

Every glass was lifted, the great silver ladle stirred the boiling mixture once more—even Major Repton got his second wind, so to speak, and began to talk with comparative coherence.

"Old Nobbs—Gobbleshim," he said.

The poet Whitehead, one of the party, who had been picked up haphazard at Warwick, and carried willy-nilly to Sherbourn by that notorious lion-hunter Mrs. Dulcimore, here expressed the desire to write an ode to Harborne's glory—something which should rhyme Mars to triumphal cars—and, as he added meekly, be the work of a mere mortal.

"Immortal," corrected Repton—"by my soul, immortal. I'll cut the throat of any man who denies it. Set him down here before me and he's a dead man already."

Whitehead admitted very modestly that his conception might be lacking in some of its details.

"Who can say," he asked them—"who can say with certainty that the gift of immortality does not breathe upon this living hour—a rose imperishable in a garland of desires?"

They applauded him loudly. Little Ensign Willoughby, who always spoke his thoughts, regardless of the company, remarked that Mr. Whitehead must certainly have written it for the club at Medmenham—the Hell Fire Club, as London and German George would call it. Carried on by his idea, he revealed to them the awful truth that Kitty Dulcimore had questioned the Colonel about this very place and declared that she would go there if he dared her.

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"Kitty would climb a steeple if any one dared her," said Beddoe.

"Or swim the ocean upon the smallest provocation," added Rupert.

Ensign Willoughby was not satisfied. In his boyish simplicity he would have learned more of that odd club, then beginning to furnish London with terrible rumors and shortly to astound an age which, we must admit, was only to be astounded by a masterpiece.

"It's an awful place, isn't it, that club?" he asked them. Beddoe shook his head.

"A school for children, eh, Rupert?"

"A seminary for youth, eh, Beddoe? Reading, writing, and the art of the billet doux."

"Fractions reduced and Venus appraised," from Repton.

"A collection of proud villains, low hucksters, cunning rogues, rare vagabonds, and unsurpassable miscreants. That's the club at Medmenham, eh, Rupert?"

"A conglomeration of the deadly sins, the living virtues, and the latest ditties from the opera. That's the club at Medmenham, eh, Beddoe?"

Willoughby stared at them reproachfully. He knew that they were telling him the truth, and yet it was not told as he would wish it.

"If you have nothing better to say of it than that, why do you go there?" he asked them.

It was a perplexing question, and puzzled them not a little. Happily, the poet Whitehead, inspired by the magnitude of his own thoughts, presently condescended to notice the boy.

"I go there," said he, magnificently, "to forget that the world is dumb."

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"And blind," added Beddoe.

"And halt," said Rupert.

"And intoxicated," put in Repton.

They repeated it in maudlin phrases, the despair of Ensign Willoughby, as they were the pride of their creators. Presently some one began to talk about London, and at this their old enthusiasm returned, and Captain Beddoe waxed eloquent upon the prospect.

"Gate of my dreams!" he cried, striving nobly with Whitehead for the honors. "London, thou city of delights; thou—er—ah—um—"

"Go on! Go on!" from many voices.

"I will continue," said the Captain, "when Rupert has the decency to pass the bowl."

Rupert did not pay the smallest attention to him. Some minutes of sullen silence passed before Ensign Willoughby reminded them that they might meet Kitty in London, and that he, personally, would think very much better of the city should they do so.

"I am sure she has been very kind to us all," he said; "and, really, we haven't treated the old people very well. She told me to-night that her father had promised to take her to London in May. We ought to be at St. James's, then, if the Colonel is to be believed."

"So we ought," said the Major. "I'm sick of this fox-hunting. Why doesn't some one give us a toast? Miss Kitty—Goblesher—"

Here was a new idea and an excuse for a second bowl. We may imagine with what zest the proposal was received. No sooner had a trim maid set the steaming liquor upon the table than Beddoe sprang to his feet, and, posing for a speech, gained the rapturous applause of a delighted company.

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"Beddoe! Beddoe! Silence for Beddoe!"

"Gentlemen," he began, "my brethren of the First—in the absence of our saintly Colonel, the excellent old Nobbs, I give you the toast of this night, and of every night, of yesterday and to-day, of to-morrow and every morrow—the ladies, God bless 'em. *En parole je vis.* You will drink with me to the name of our sweet Kitty; Kitty, the flower of the flock; Kitty, who has been a sister to us since good-fortune sent us to this house; Kitty, whose father's hospitality is worthy of a gallant gentleman—this toast I give you with confidence. Gentlemen, we came out to this wilderness to catch a traitor, but Kitty has caught us, God bless her! Some will say that we ought to have married her—gentlemen, we have not done it—I appeal to you with confidence—we have not done it, and we should have done it. Does not the country-side bear me out in this? The regiment should have married Kitty Dulcimore, and it has not done so. Shame upon us—shame upon us all."

The liquor had warmed him—all, indeed, were far from that primitive state of sobriety then considered unbecoming to an officer and a gentleman. When he asked them for the twentieth time why they had not married Kitty Dulcimore, the others could but cry: "Why not? Why not?" and repeat the saying in incoherent persistency. Presently, however, he turned upon them sharply, and put the question with such persistence that he might have been inspired, not by the liquor, but by some honorable sentiment very foreign to such a condition.

"Are we going to leave like thieves in the night?" he cried; and asked them: "Answer me that? Are we going to see Mistress Kitty made the sport of the country-side, or shall we do our duty? Reflect upon it in the secret chambers

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of your hearts. I give you the toast—the bravest, the most beautiful, the truest little woman in all England to-day, Kitty Dulcimore."

It was good to see the enthusiasm with which this toast was drunk. But, anon, an odd silence fell upon the company, as though the light words had stung them, and they were sensible of the reproach which this persiflage conveyed. As for little Ensign Willoughby, he had colored like a girl while Captain Beddoe spoke; but he dared not utter the thoughts which troubled him, and it remained for that old wiseacre, Repton, to come down to *terra firma* again.

"Are you quite sober, Beddoe?" he asked.

"Sirl" said Beddoe, half rising, in affronted gravity.

"A plain question, Beddoe—d' you mean it?"

Some one laughed foolishly at this, and the bowl went round, as though to divert attention from an awkward subject. The Marquis, however, stuck to his guns and would have an answer. He had a wonderful head for the liquor, and the more he drank of it the wiser he became. At least, the family tradition would have it that way.

"D' you mean it, Beddoe?"

"Every word of it—we ought to marry her."

"Owing much to the house," put in Rupert.

"And more to Miss Kitty," said Ensign Willoughby.

"For myself," said the poet Whitehead, "I have found the wines good, the women pretty, and the linen well aired—undoubtedly a comfortable place."

"Which makes it all the more desirable that we should marry Kitty," Beddoe insisted.

"Then why the devil don't you do it?" asked Repton, almost angrily.

"Because," retorted Beddoe, solemnly, "I am not con-

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scious of that call, without which—er—um—by Jove—without which—”

“I’ll tell you what,” said Repton, growing more angry as the talk proceeded; “it’s my opinion that you are going to play a scoundrel’s part. Marry the girl, and have done with it. If you can’t agree, draw lots—imitate Joseph’s brethren—but do not disgrace the regiment, or, by Heaven, you shall answer to me.”

Well, it came upon them like a thunderbolt. Many accounts of this memorable scene have been published, and in all of them there is this apology of surprise—that what was done they did in jest, because their superior officer, the Marquis of Repton, forced it upon them.

Remember that the liquor had not been spared; that it was ten o’clock at night—a late hour at such an epoch.

Remember this, and we may even accept some of those excuses which the old chronicle has made so much of.

To draw lots for little Kitty Dulcimore—it had come to that, then! Watch Beddoe as he springs up at the idea. Follow Rupert while he laughs tipsily for many minutes together. Be at little Ensign Willoughby’s side when his eyes shine like stars and his heart beats so rapidly that he can hardly sit still upon his chair. Not three minutes have passed before Captain Beddoe has snatched a silver bowl from the buffet, and the poet Whitehead is cutting up the slips of paper—one of which shall mean so much, not only to him who draws it, but to others. The men work like Trojans. There is sweat upon their faces. One of them begins to sing, “Come, landlord, fill the flowing bowl,” but is immediately silenced by the others.

“Gentlemen,” says Captain Beddoe, speaking in a hoarse whisper, “silence, if you please. We are about to make

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reparation to the house of Dulcimore. Servants of king and country, it has been said that our honor is—er—”

“Tarnished,” suggested Whitehead, and the Captain thanked him.

“That our honor is tarnished—well, we are going to polish it up—to re-establish ourselves in the eyes of the world—to do that which we should have done under no compulsion whatever. He who draws the paper from this bowl, he will marry the Lady Kitty Dulcimore—on his oath he will marry her.”

They all lifted a hand in solemn assent. Some of their faces were white enough, but it is to be questioned if any among them except Ensign Willoughby knew what he was doing, or what the penalties of his acts might be. Inconsequent exclamations attended the business of the final preparations. The poet Whitehead drummed with his fingers upon the shining table—Rupert was sorting the papers—Repton laughed drolly, as though his thoughts were too much for him—the lad Willoughby did not lift his staring eyes from the dread bowl.

And then upon it all came a loud knocking at the door—and instantly, as at a call to judgment, the men ceased their occupation and asked who came.



IV

THE AMAZING HISTORY OF THE LOTTERY CONTINUED

OW, the Queen of the Amazons was in a rare tantrum, and wildly enough she spoke when she rushed in among that shamed company. So quickly did her entrance follow upon her knock that Beddoe hardly had time to cover the silver bowl with a napkin or Rupert to hide the accusing papers with his sleeve. There the men sat, stupid, blear-eyed, afraid—and there stood Clara Dulcimore, wife of Anthony Dulcimore, Esquire, as full of her story as a parson of his "thirdly."

"Gentlemen!" she cried, and then, that there might be no mistake about it, she repeated the word, "gentlemen, oh, gentlemen!"

Ensign Willoughby was on his feet by this time, and the others imitated him with what grace they could, the Marquis of Repton being the incapable exception. He, fine fellow, boldly gave it up, and expressed the homage due to madam's sex by clutching the table with one hand and the mantelpiece with the other—and there he sat, stretched out like a tailor's dummy on a footwalk.

"Madam," he protested, "my dear lady, be calm—control yourself."

"Gentlemen!" cried old Mrs. Dulcimore for the fourth

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time, "Sir Richard Escombe—Sir Richard Escombe—gentlemen—he is at Sherbourn—he is here!"

Dramatic soul! Had she lived some thirty years later, she might have proved a serious rival to the worthy Sarah Siddons. As it was, her very striving after the pose dramatic merely made her ridiculous. The men, upon their part, in danger of discovery no longer, treated her information with a levity which moved her almost to tears. In plain truth, they were a hundred miles from believing her.

"Sir Richard Escombe at Sherbourn!" cried Captain Rupert. "My dear madam, that is quite impossible."

"Nothing's impossible when it happens," interjected the maudlin Repton. He knew that he was a fool to speak at all, but for the life of him he could not keep the words back. "Nothing's impossibile when it happens. What time did the beggar come here?"

Mrs. Dulcimore wrung her hands.

"As I'm a living woman," she cried, "Sir Richard's in the hall this very moment. And me husband in Warwick, and none but a pack of tipsy gentlemen to keep the house. God help me! What shall I do?"

Her very earnestness sobered them. Major, the Marquis of Repton, who had the best brains of the company, now sat bolt-upright, confessing to himself that he would have given ten pounds could he have stood straight upon his legs.

"Did he say what brings him here?" he asked, with reason.

"He said just nothing at all!" cried the old lady, overjoyed that one proper answer, at any rate, should be given her. "He's in my parlor, and he would speak with his old friends, he says. 'Tell them they have had the honor'—yes, that was it—'the honor of drinking wine with me in

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London, and, faith, I'd drink a glass with them in Warwick."

"The devil he did!" cries Repton.

"Yes, and then—ah, I remember now—something Abbey, yes, Medmenham Abbey—I was to tell you—but, gentlemen, it's all gone out of my poor old head, and, God help me, I feel just as though a robber had come to my house."

Her evident distress did much to rebuke the company, if but for the moment. There was a little talk aside. Then Repton, struggling to his feet at last, bade madam be of good cheer.

"Let Sir Richard join us here," he said. "There are many reasons why he should do so. Willoughby, bring the gentleman in to us. And you, madam, be assured that we will relieve you of all responsibility in the matter."

She suffered herself to be led away, and Ensign Willoughby went out to do the Major's bidding. When he was gone, Repton turned sharply to Captain Beddoe, and, speaking as an officer of the regiment, commanded a silent hearing.

"Escombe was a friend of mine," he said. "I am sorry that he should come here, but I have no choice. He must be detained until the Colonel returns—if necessary, by force."

"That should not be very difficult, Major."

"Are you so sure of it? Look at yourself in the glass and at me. This is the best fighter in France to-day. Are you sure that we can keep him here?"

"At least we may try—eh, Rupert?"

Rupert said "Yes," and turned toward the door. They could hear footsteps in the passage, and presently Ensign Willoughby flung the door wide open, and there upon the

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threshold stood the man whom their regiment and others had hunted since Prince Charlie rode down to Derby. Shall we wonder that a dead silence fell upon the room? Nothing, surely, so astounding had happened in all the months since the trouble began.

Let us take a glance at mad Dick Escombe as he stands there in the doorway. History has told us that he was then thirty-one years old—not a very tall man, but lithe and shapely, with a woman's gray-blue eyes and a mass of curly brown hair that had just a glint of gold in it—and certainly lacked a wig this night—firm to prominent in the chin, the nose was small and slightly tilted, the forehead high, the back of the head well-rounded, the shoulders speaking of great physical strength, the hands of almost a woman's delicacy. Dressed for riding, he wore coat and breeches of an olive-green cloth, high leather boots almost to his thighs, ruffles at wrist and throat, and in his hand he carried a three-cornered hat with gold embroidery about the brim. Perhaps you would have said that it was the manner of the man rather than his physical qualities which made others go in such awe of him—a wonderfully gentle and kindly manner, that of the grand seigneur added to a Celtic freedom and courtesy altogether irresistible. Let Dick Escombe enter any room in Europe, and men's eyes (and women's, too) would turn after him. Let him speak aloud, and there is silence all about. That, at any rate, is what Chesterfield has written of him—and who should know if such a man be discredited?

Here, then, you have the intruder who stood in the doorway upon that memorable evening and bowed, a little ironically, perhaps, to the assembled company. The men, upon their part, were utterly at a loss—and small wonder

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that they should have been. Was not this a traitor and an outlaw—a man for whom the prison, if not the scaffold, waited? And he came in here among them just as if the house were his own and they his guests. Could effrontery go further? they were asking themselves.

“Gentlemen,” says Sir Richard, bowing low, “your obedient servant.”

Well, no man had a word to say to this. There was Repton still balancing himself against the chimney; there were the automatic Beddoe and Rupert standing together by the punch-bowl; there sprawled the gaping poet; and yonder Master Willoughby fidgeted with his thumbs. Good-luck to the lad—some impulse he could not control warmed his heart, and he strode across the room and offered Dick his hand.

“Sir Richard.”

“Ah—a man.”

He shook the out-stretched hand warmly, and turned again to the others.

“Gentlemen,” he cried, his voice sour as vinegar—“Captain Rupert, Captain Beddoe. I ask your pardon for this intrusion.”

Once more they held their tongues. Repton had something to say, but the heat of the fire and the liquor he had taken quite deprived him of utterance. And while he hesitated Dick went on.

“I ask your pardon for this intrusion—if it were your house, I would make ye a handsome apology; but not being your house, but my friend Mr. Dulcimore’s, then, I say, pray make yourself at home, and, faith, I’ll do the same entirely.”

He strode across the oak parlor toward the fire, and

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turned his back upon the Marquis as he did so. The awkward pause which followed his address did not daunt him at all. Five men in that apartment knew perfectly well that their master stood among them, and not one had the courage to answer him a word. Our charity can but suppose that they waited for the Major—and the Major's tongue had tied itself into cunning knots when he would speak of an "unexpected pleasure." It remained for Captain Beddoe to stammer out something foolish.

"Sir Richard," he began, "I am sure we all feel—that is to say, we are—eh, Rupert?"

To which Rupert answered in effect that he was quite of Beddoe's opinion.

"Ha," says Sir Richard, laughing at them about the corners of a wicked mouth; "ye're mighty pleased to see me, by my soul. My old friend Beddoe, too—'twas a little sprig of a saucy boy that I remember in London. Captain, if your heart has grown as big as your body, you're a fine man entirely."

"Sir!" cried Beddoe—for whether to take it as an affront or a compliment he knew no more than the dead.

Sir Dick, however, was enjoying himself immensely.

"It was my hope," he went on, "that your Colonel, loving me dearly as he does, would be here to kill the fatted calf when I came in. I do not see him, and the calf is lowing in the meadows."

"Lord Harborne has been called away upon urgent business concerning the regiment," said Rupert.

"And will not be detained long," added Beddoe.

"The Colonel has gone over to headquarters to talk about you, Sir Richard," said little Ensign Willoughby;

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and the poet Whitehead added, *sotto voce*: "A damned tragic subject, as I live."

Dick heard them patiently. Not so very long ago he had been telling himself that this intrusion might not be unattended with certain risks of a personal nature; but these he now perceived to be illusory, and the hope of seeing Kitty warming within him, he was amused both by the maladroitness and perplexities of the witless company about him.

"A tragic subject I will be when your Colonel pays his losses on Wild Rose," said he.

And then, quite kindly, he asked them:

"Has the old horse wounded any of you in this room? I trust not. I would not have it so."

This was like the old Dick, and it did not fail to warm some hearts toward him. After all, he had been a man whom other men were proud to know in the days before the tragedy, and it soon became evident that none of his old mastery of men had been lost to him. When little Willoughby declared frankly that none but the Colonel had been foolish enough to bet against Richard Escombe, and that Kitty had won upon the horse, the color came again to Dick's cheeks, and he answered them almost boisterously.

"Then you won, gentlemen? Good-luck to all of ye. Were ye not at your wine when I came in—'twould be at old Dulcimore's wine, more correctly—but will ye say of me that I kept thirsty men from their liquor? Shame upon the thought! A glass to Wild Rose. Come, gentlemen, I'll give ye the toast."

He crossed to the table and laid his hand upon the very bowl from which they had been upon the point of drawing the lots. This was the moment at which Major Repton at

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last found his tongue and contrived a sentence whose sibilants did not baffle him.

"Sir Richard Escombe," he said, "I think it right to tell you that Colonel Harborne will not welcome you to this house."

"And why not?" Dick asked, staying his hand at the question.

"You yourself can best answer that."

"I can answer it, Major, when any man who has the right to question speaks the word."

"That's your own affair," continued the Major, pettishly, but little Ensign Willoughby, putting his foot in it as usual, blurted out the whole story of Dick's supposed delinquencies.

"They say that you bolted out of England, Sir Richard, and were with the Prince at Derby. The Colonel's going to arrest you."

"A cursed black indictment in hexameters," murmured the poet. Dick minded neither of them.

"Harborne always was a sprig of a man," he said, lightly. "I remember that I had to flog him on the Mall. Does he say that I was at Derby?"

"A great many people say it."

"'Tis kind of them entirely. Indeed, and I was there all the time."

They looked at him amazed. Incredible to believe that he had admitted an offence which might cost him his head. Either he was mad or he knew that the game was up and had taken this short road to judgment. Dick, meanwhile, would laugh about the corners of that wicked mouth of his.

"Will I not be saying it? Sir John Cope knows that I was there. Good-luck to him. And since we must speak

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of it, gentlemen, a toast to that same King ye mention. I say, God bless him."

Now, this was rank treason, and hardly had it been uttered when four hands flew to the place where four swords should have been and a fifth fumbled idly at the waist-belt. Whitehead, more dramatic than the others, cried: "*Et tu Brute—then fall Cæsar.*" Major Repton took a step forward, as though he would dash the cup from Dick's hands.

"Silence!" he roared.

"Sir," says Dick, very sweetly, "a glass to good King George. Will ye deny me that?"

So here you have him laughing at them again, and before their anger has passed he is apostrophizing the merits of the punch in the silver cup he had mistaken for a bowl.

"The punch of my country, the punch of your country, gentlemen; God was good to the world when he taught us to make punch. Join me in a cup to George of Dettingen, for that's a toast every honest man should drink."

He cast the napkin aside and lifted the cup. If we do not dwell upon his astonishment, let the circumstances be our apology. Dick Escombe had quenched his thirst with many liquors in many lands, but never yet had he been asked to toast a king in slips of paper. As for the men round about him, their faces had turned the color of honest beet-root. How sorry and mean a thing the jest appeared to be now! And what excuses could they make—what apologies offer to such a man? They knew he was about to whip them soundly.

"Sure," he cried, "ye have a lawyer among ye?"

"It's a little private affair," says Rupert.

"We were drawing lots, sir," chimed in Master Willoughby, and to Captain Rupert he declared that he couldn't

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help it. His tongue was like a thorough-bred. Touch it with the whip in question and away it went.

"Why should ye help it, lad?" asked Sir Richard, who had overheard him. "Is there anything in all the world a man should be less ashamed of than his love for a good horse?"

"Unless it be his love for a pretty girl," Willoughby retorted.

Dick would not demur to that.

"Ay, a pretty girl, surely! But, ye'll understand, life's not so unkind to us that we draw lots for our women. Now look at me, Dick Escombe. Thirty-one years have I lived and never put me hand upon a lucky bag yet. A good woman and a good horse. Was it not a sweepstake ye were drawing?"

Beddoe said boldly that it was. They had recovered their courage, and a touch of malice to it to give it flavor. Why should not the thing go on? If they could drag him into it, his silence was assured, and, besides, Kitty's partiality and weakness were known. It would be an excellent jest to let him win the lucky number, and wait for that which must follow after. So much Beddoe whispered to Rupert and Rupert to Repton while Dick was talking to little Willoughby.

"It will keep him until the Colonel comes," Beddoe said.

"If we can manage it," Repton replied. He was much sobered, and began to speak with some coherence.

They talked aside at the corner of the mantel-piece, but Dick, still at the table, waxed more eloquent while they whispered, and declaimed loudly upon the merits of a sweepstake.

"Say, what is it?" he asked them; "a guinea, a hundred,

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a horse, a hound, a palace, a kingdom—faith, Dick Escombe's with ye. Say, friends, what is it, now?"

"You can come in if you like," Rupert answered, with as much nonchalance as he could command. "I'll write out a number for you. We aren't paying anything. You'll understand that better afterward."

This was said to give him a better opportunity of manipulating the papers. He did not wait for Dick to respond, but, calling Beddoe to his side, began at once to sift the lots.

"You draw from the plate, Beddoe, and I'll call. Now, number one?"

"A blank," said Beddoe.

"A hundred I don't win the prize!" cried Dick. No one took him.

"Two?"

"Blank."

"Three?"

"Blank."

"Four?"

"By Jove—Sir Richard!"

"What!" cried Escombe, "I've won?"

"There's no doubt about it. Look at the list."

An amused smile crossed Dick's face as he took the paper from the out-stretched hand. Then he asked, quite simply:

"And what may the prize be?"

"Read it," said Repton. He was staring at young Wiloughby, who had turned as white as a sheet again.

Sir Richard unfolded the paper, smiling all the while. Presently he began to read in a slow, measured voice which betrayed neither overmuch curiosity nor unfeigned joy at his unexpected luck.

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"Who draws this marries Kitty Dulcimore—upon his solemn word of honor."

Sir Dick, we say, read the words very slowly, and then the paper fluttered from his hand. For an instant even his face turned deadly pale, but he drew himself more erect, and, seeing the sorry looks all about him, he strode across to Beddoe and laid his hand upon his sword.

"Sir," he cried, "you lied to me!"

"Sir," stammered Beddoe.

"Deny it not or, by God! you shall answer where you stand. You lied to me."

"In jest," retorted Beddoe, lamely.

Dick's look was something to see.

"In jest!" he thundered, swinging round upon his heel to face the others. "Is it in jest, then, that the officers of the Dragoons, with the King's coat upon their backs—is it in jest that they would shame the truest little woman in Europe this night? God Almighty give me patience! Is it in jest?"

Not a man spoke. Not one could answer him. They stood dumb and ashamed before him; and while they so stood, some one opened the door, and without a word Kitty Dulcimore came in among them.



V

WHICH IS ABOUT KITTY AND OTHERS



Now, the precise reason which sent Kitty to the oak parlor at such a moment and under such circumstances might well provide a feast of argument to the logic chopper and man of abstract philosophies.

He, flowery soul, would love to tell us, in the manner of a Greek chorus, speaking perchance beneath a mask and wearing the soccus or the cothurnus as the mood dictated. He would tell us the whole story both of her coming and her going; how she had linked arms with that fine scoundrel, Master Coincidence; how she fluttered and sank beneath the embarrassments of her surprise; how very astonished Sir Richard was to see her; the apologies she made and the appeals that he uttered; with all this a chorus properly would have to do. We, however, find the matter of no interest whatever. We do not care a Georgian guinea why she came to the parlor; we do not purpose to ask her any questions; we are convinced that she was troubled neither by a becoming hysteria nor by a fashionable fluttering. We know Kitty too well to suppose any such absurdity.

It may be, of course, that the whole story was very simple. She may just have overheard Dick's voice, and, fearing for his safety, may have run to warn him of Lord Har-

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borne's visit to Warwick. If such an explanation does not suit the proper intrigues of comedy, that is no fault of ours. The truths of life are usually very artless; we do not seek to make them otherwise. For us it is sufficient to show Kitty upon the threshold and Sir Richard still warm in his anger, and, upon that, men sidling from the room and Rep-ton stammering an apology, and the poet murmuring a distich, and, finally, just as though it had been done by the hey, presto, of a conjurer, Dick and Kitty alone together—and the others gone, Heaven knows where.

Understand, if you please, that the five officers were in no mood to let this proper rebel escape the house without further question. The grooms already had possession of Dick's jaded horse; there were others upon the road to make an audience for that flute-playing rogue, Barry Michigan. Whatever else happened to him, Sir Richard must give a good account of himself and must give it quickly, if he would escape a long residence in Warwick jail. This the tipsy company understood very well when it had the decency to withdraw from the room and leave Kitty to tell her own story.

"Let Harborne settle our debt," said Beddoe, wisely. "Why should we risk our skins when there is no necessity? I'm for another bottle over at the inn. The man won't run while Kitty's with him, and why should we go thirsty? Let Rupert tell us if he can."

Neither Rupert nor the Major demurred. All were much excited by what had happened, and while the Marquis still found a good word to say to Dick, little Willoughby could speculate upon nothing but the lottery.

"Will he propose to her, do you think?" he asked them one by one.

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They replied to him that he ought to have done it three years ago. "But she won't marry him if he does," said Repton, with conviction. "The old woman has taught her to fly at higher game."

"At Harborne," said Rupert, with a grin; and he added, sententiously: "Delectable divinity, how very modest she is!"

From this it is to be perceived that the men were far from being at their ease, although the most part of the danger lay behind them. Many minutes could not pass before the Colonel returned from Warwick. Let him give the order and Richard Escombe's liberty would not have five minutes to run. The situation, indeed, gratified both their curiosity and their affronted dignity; for, while they still smarted under Dick's accusation, they knew that the law would avenge them in the end.

And what of little Kitty meanwhile—Kitty, who had but just sung of arms and of men; who had been daring and devilry itself when Frederick Lord Harborne was upon the scene! Behold how great a change had come upon Kitty. There she stood, a flush of roses for her cheeks, her head poised upon a fair white neck, doubt and hope and fear in her eyes. Did she not tell herself that she loved this wild outlaw of a man, that for her there was none other in all the world, had been none other. She met him, first in Ireland as a mere child, again in London on the outskirts of the court, and lastly by Moreton Fell, in Cumberland, whither her father had gone at Sir Richard's bidding. Oh, Sir Richard had always been the hero in her eyes! These sorry events of kings across the seas and kings at St. James's, what were they to Kitty? She loved the man, and he had never loved her. Such was her belief, though perchance pride hid it even from herself.

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And so she came before him with more than a flutter at her heart and more than a tale of wild surprise in her clear blue eyes. Look at the pair of them, and you may say that they would pass anywhere for brother and sister. The same wicked laugh about a shapely mouth, the same curly brown hair upon a high, white forehead, clear skin, retroussé nose, pretty hands, fine carriage—Kitty had them just as markedly as Dick, and was equally well aware of it. And this was the more surprising when we remember that he had an English mother and she had not, that the English blood in his veins had waxed rich upon the rare meats of Cumberland, while such English ancestry as she boasted had come originally from Cockney town itself, a fine Puritanical breed, who were Praise-God-Barebones or Sing-to-the-Lord-Lustily-Pennyfeather in the days when Charles was King.

These are things we must remember now, when the pair came together again and Kitty was on fire to speak all her heart to Dick. How glad she was to see him! How willingly she would have run to him and taken both his hands in hers! Pride, the old enemy, alone forbade her. And pride could simply say:

“Sir Richard—oh, Sir Richard—”

“What!” cried Dick, “is it ‘Sir Richard’ I am to you, Kitty?”

She tried to face it out as he crossed the floor toward her; tried to be the brave little body that would tell him nothing either of her joy or her sorrow—but lo! the woman within her suddenly spoke, and gone was all disguise in a twinkling.

“Oh, Dick, why have you never been near us? Why have we not heard from you—months, months, months? What is it, Dick?—what has kept you from our house?”

He held her hand in his, and drew her toward the chim-

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ney. There, for a little while, he looked down upon the childish face lifted to his own, and recalled such a sweet dream of the old time that his voice came near to breaking when he spoke to her.

“There were soldiers for your friends, and they didn’t like me, Kitty,” he said, at last. “Fortune quarrelled with me, and went sailing away over the sea. I had to leave the regiment—”

“Dick—why did you leave it, Dick?”

He sighed and bade her sit by him on the settle. The firelight played warm upon both their faces—and upon the great silver bowl behind them, from which he had just drawn the paper which put him on his oath to marry her.

“Why did I leave the regiment? Has Harborne never told you that?”

She bent her head. How could she answer him?

“I doubt not he has been very eloquent. Did his eloquence make mention of that which followed after Medmenham?”

She looked up with interest now.

“The abbey near Windsor, Dick? The place where Mr. Wilkes and his friends play at being monks?”

“No other. Would that you had never heard the name of it, Kitty. ‘Twas there I quarrelled with your friend, Lord Harborne.”

“He is not my friend, Dick.”

“All the town says so. What else keeps him from the court and his pleasures?”

“Oh, Dick, Dick! If you knew the truth!”

“I do know it, Kitty. This was the man who brought a young lad to his death at the Medmenham Club—because of a rule binding all men of honor, but forgotten in a mad

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hour by the boy who broke it. Would ye hear the story, Kitty?"

"Would I hear it from you, Dick?"

He drew her a little closer to him, and began to speak in a low voice.

"Medmenham is but a village on the banks of the river," he said. "'Twas a Franciscan monastery in the old time. Now it is the home of rakes and rascals—wits who have lost their wit, gamesters who have no honor in their games, the froth and scum of the palace and the city. For such amusement as it could give me in the old days, I went there with the others. Their rules I obeyed while they were rules a man of honor could observe. The day came when I was called upon to show my true opinion of them. Harborne will have told you of that day, Kitty?"

She turned away her head, hiding a crimson face from him and almost ashamed to speak.

"The story of Honor Marwood, Dick?"

"The story of Honor Marwood, Kitty. She went to the club with your noble friend. Young Willy Fenton, the son of old Fenton, the parson, of the Savoy, fell head over ears in love with her, though she was but a dancer from the theatre. He broke the rule of the house which says that no man shall come between a member and his guest—when that guest is a lady. Should he do so, he shall die by his own hand before sunset on the following day. It is a law made of necessity, by men who would pass in madness the philosophies of the rosy cross. Ye see the kind of company it is—hot bloods who would draw sword upon the raising of an eyebrow; bullies and blackguards from the taverns and the theatres. Mr. Wilkes was right to make such a law and say that it should be kept."

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“And young Fenton broke it, Dick?”

“Young Fenton broke it. I was in London, and knew nothing of it until three days had passed. ‘Twas too late then, Kitty; he had shot himself, but I whipped the man who drove him to his death, and I whipped him where all the town should know of it. Thereafter, it is a story of those who had the King’s ear against me. Could I have spoken for myself, the mischief had not been done; but I was in Cumberland when they planned it, and German George, who loves a soldier, gave me no soldier’s hearing, for they told him I took a whip in my hand because I was afraid. That’s why I left the regiment, Kitty; that’s the affair of Honor Marwood.”

Kitty’s heart beat fast enough at this—there is no such music for a woman’s ears as a man’s denial that his love is elsewhere—but a woman had been named, and about that woman she must know more, though the heavens fall.

“I’m so glad, Dick,” she said, “so glad—but did you not like her a little, Dick?”

“Ah, Kitty, ‘tis a woman’s heart that is speaking all the while. And will I be angry with it—Dick, who knows what a woman’s heart may be? Let me tell you this—she was no more to me than a little, pitiful face in a sea of trouble. I would have stretched out a hand to her—she was to have been married—she would have done well but for Harborne and his slanders. Well, he answered to me for them—and, Kitty, will ye tell me when you began to believe what this man said to you?”

It wholly reassured her—how easily is a woman who loves thus comforted! Dick’s fine faith in himself was ever infectious. Kitty, she knew not why, had almost forgotten

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her fears for his safety by this time. And, forgetting them, a little friend of laughter came and sat beside her.

"Am I not to believe that great gentleman, Dick—the salt of the earth?"

"Ananias in boots and breeches—"

"Oh, but, Dick—when he returns to London—"

"God send him there soon."

"When he returns to London I'm to have a place at the court—to be near him, Dick—to be near him always. He calls me Thalia, and the Queen of Ireland when I am tired of that—Kitty the Rose, and Kitty the Shamrock—and he wouldn't know a shamrock if he saw one. Do you know, Dick, I believe that Captain Beddoe paints like a play actress?"

"The sprig of a man—would he marry you as well as the others?"

Kitty laughed. She was too young to understand his meaning wholly.

"Marry me, Dick!" she exclaimed, in surprise.

"'Tis not very fashionable talk in these days, but I'd be asking you all the same. Has Lord Harborne spoken to you of marriage?"

She shook her head just like a child who does not remember.

"I'm to have a house full of jewels—when he's dead, Dick. Oh, what talk of diamonds, and pearls, and rubies!"

"And, Kitty—ye never remembered Dick when the precious stones were shining?"

"Why should I when Dick was so far away from me?"

She spoke a truth. Richard Escombe had always seemed to stand so far above her that even her warm heart had never dared to whisper the words: "He loves me." Even now, at the happy moment of it, when his hot words were poured into her astonished ears, when he caught her in his

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arms and his lips burned upon her own—even then Kitty could not wholly believe that this great happiness had come to her.

“Kitty,” he cried, “‘tis true, and I am ashamed—but I had no right then—and God knows what right I have now. My home sold to strangers—my horses gone—God bless ‘em!—what right had I to come and speak? But, Kitty, there’s never been a day since I first saw you that I had not love for you in my heart—ay, the little dare-devil Kitty, who rode my brown mare when no man would look at her twice—Kitty, who climbed from the window of the school-house, that she might see Dick Escombe—Kitty, who made the priest dance at the fair—’twas my Kitty always—mine always—to redeem a man who sees the world black before him and is looking for a light—my Kitty, if the sun will shine upon me—that’s what I should have told ye long ago—that’s what I would have ye hear to-night—Kitty, my darling—have ye no answer—will ye be silent when Dick Escombe speaks?”

He had drawn her nearer and nearer, and now he folded her close in his arms. The dream of her happiness had come true—the hope of her girlhood rewarded beyond all her faith.

And what answer could she make him, what subterfuge or girlish pretence or mock aside, beloved of the times? In truth, Kitty would have naught to do with these, but, laughing, crying, and nestling to him, she just lifted her pretty face, and said:

“I love you, Dick—I have always loved you—my Dick, my dearest boy.”

Who would have the heart to tell her that Fate stood at her elbow, and that the hour of her sorrow was at hand?

VI

OF AN AFFAIR WHICH HAS AN UNPLEASANT ENDING



HERE is no precious record at Sherbourn of the circumstances under which that very firm-willed lady, Clara Dulcimore, accompanied by Anthony, of the same name, almost discovered Kitty in Sir Richard's arms, but we may be sure that the affair had a tragic side enough.

Two who are in a corner with the firelight playing upon their happy faces, two who speak of love and to-morrow, are apt to be a little absent-minded where merely mundane affairs are concerned.

To be quite honest about it, Dick and Kitty had forgotten the very existence of that magnificent personage, the Colonel of the Regiment, when they heard his step in the passage and his greeting to Anthony Dulcimore thundered through the house. If the lovers sprang apart, if Dick stood up and Kitty continued to sit, well, many a thousand have imitated them since that dreary night of March, and many a thousand will so act a part in the years to come. No devotees at a prayer-meeting wore a more innocent look when discovery came. Even that termagant, Clara Dulcimore, hardly knew what to say to them. She could but stand and dart fury from her amazed eyes, and her timid

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husband for once forgot to apologize to any man. It remained for Lord Harborne to speak.

“Sir Richard Escombe,” says he, in the manner of a player at the King’s Theatre.

“My lord,” says Sir Richard, with incomparable dignity.

“I am here to know the meaning of your presence in this house.”

“Being your house, my lord?” asked Dick, proudly.

“Being the house of one of His Majesty’s subjects, who will not harbor rebels.”

Dick laughed with fine scorn.

“Twas another name ye called me when last we met. Shall I remind ye? On the Mall at London, when I had a whip in my hand?”

“Gentlemen,” cries Lord Harborne, blazing with fury—“gentlemen, you hear this?” for the officers had followed him to the room.

Dick did not care a rap of the fingers for them. He knew that Kitty watched him narrowly; he understood all that she must feel and suffer in this moment, and never did a man so delight in his victory.

“They hear it, be sure,” he rejoined, in answer to my lord’s question. “The world is never deaf when the tale concerns a rogue. You ask me why I came here? My lord, ‘twas to bring you the good news that I am on my way to London, and beg you to obey the command which His Majesty is gracious enough to write.”

Harborne stepped back as though a man had shot him. Those in the room now stood in two companies, as it were—upon the one side the Colonel, his officers, and the master of the house; upon the other, Dick and Kitty, and her mother, still so enraged that coherent utterance was denied

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her. And between the ranks this grenade fell. Escombe on his way to London! Harborne would as soon have believed that they had made him a peer.

"A command from the King!" cried he, taking a step backward as he spoke. "I believe it when I have it, sir."

"Then I'll not keep ye waiting, my lord, since the love of your company is mostly on your own side. Be pleased to read that—and when you have read it, to answer me as the King determines."

He drew a long, white parchment from his pocket, and held it out toward the amazed Colonel. Such was the general astonishment that the others crowded about their chief, and peered at the crabbed black writing and the royal arms which crowned the document, as though they had come from another world. No man who had received a letter from St. James's could mistake the nature of this letter. Harborne took it at last, his fingers trembling with rage, and, having taken it, he turned aside that he might read it by the light of the candles still burning upon the table.

"I will give you my answer presently," he said, and to that Sir Richard did but bow assent.

"My lord," he said, "your despatch shall be made mention of at the palace, believe me."

He spoke lightly enough; yet, had Dick Escombe but known it, this was as sorrowful an hour as he must live in the course of that stirring life of his. Fate, to be sure, was about to play a scurvy trick upon Sir Richard—a trick, be it said, that should cost him a woman's love and the whole fruit of his immediate happiness, and send him to London, not as a victor triumphant, but as a man who has played for

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all and won nothing, ashamed before them, and unable to answer anything. This, in truth, is what came of it, and how it came you shall now hear.

Lord Harborne, we have said, was at the table reading the King's letter; the officers had gone over toward Mrs. Dulcimore—all but Captain Beddoe, who stood near Kitty, and, being still hazy with the wine, made a poor affair of the attempt to please her. Dick himself waited for my lord, proud and erect, and glorying in that *volte face* which a bit of white parchment had contrived. All, in fact, appeared to be going as merrily as a marriage bell when up comes the little imp of mischief they call "mischance," and no sooner had he said a dozen words than the fat is in the fire, and a great wrong done to as fine a gentleman as any that history has heard of.

It was Captain Beddoe's doing—there is not a doubt of it. Anxious to please Kitty, his drunken wit perhaps planning some mischief toward Sir Richard, what must he do but make mention of the lottery—and this not directly, but by means of a question.

"Well," he asked her, as they stood in the corner together, "and may I congratulate you, Miss Dulcimore?"

"Upon what?" Kitty asked, very naturally.

"Upon your engagement to Sir Richard," says he, laughing out of his queer little eyes, and rocking upon his heels as a man not over-sure of his balance. Kitty's face, they say, flushed as crimson as the paper on the walls when she heard him.

"Upon my engagement to Sir Richard! But what do you know of that, Captain Beddoe?"

"I put the papers in the bowl, that's what I know of it. He drew the lucky number—of course he did—who else

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should have been drawing it? Sir Richard's a fine man. Congratulations, Miss Dulcimore, upon my soul."

Unconsciously his eyes turned toward the guilty bowl; he perceived the slip of paper still lying on the ground, and not alone he, but Sir Richard also. God knows what sudden fear came into Dick's heart, but he looked quickly at Kitty and she at him, and it was as though some great wall of misunderstanding rose up between them in an instant and never would be pulled down again. Neither spoke a word; that dreadful silent question was understood none the less, and Dick knew how difficult it would be to answer it.

"My lord," cries he, suddenly turning to Harborne as though he could suffer the silence no longer—"my lord—"

Lord Harborne, who had perused the paper twice, now folded it very carefully and handed it back with a fine bow.

"I perceive," says he, "that the King has need of you in London, and that all commanding officers are to expedite your journey thither. His Majesty's wishes are my commands. What do you need that this house can give?"

"A horse," says Sir Richard—"a horse, my lord, and shelter for my own poor beast that is sadly broken."

"There is nothing which we shall find as willingly," says my lord, with a sneer; and then he told Mr. Dulcimore: "I will send one of my own if this is inconvenient, Mr. Dulcimore."

"Not inconvenient at all, my lord," cried the obsequious old gentleman. "I would apologize to Sir Richard Escombe that I have nothing better than my black horse Patrick, but if he would deign to rest here until the morning—that is, if it would be agreeable for him to sleep here—"

He hesitated, afraid, perhaps, of his own temerity, and of that which Mrs. Dulcimore would have to say upon it

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by-and-by. To the surprise and wonder of all, however, it was Kitty who next spoke, coming out among them, and facing Dick as though she would strike him upon the face.

"Deny it!" she cried, forgetting all about her, the hot shame of it burning in her blood; "deny what this gentleman has told me!"

"He can't deny it," says Beddoe, lurching forward. "Put him to the proof and hear him. He can't deny it."

Dick did not ask them what. As in a flash the whole business of the lottery came back to his memory, his own hot anger, the bowl upon the table, the affront he had put upon them. How could he tell Kitty such a story? And what right had she to doubt him, even to question his honor toward her? Oh, be sure, he was wholly an Irishman who had now swung about upon his heel and matched his pride against her own.

"Do you believe it, Kitty?" he asked her.

"Tell me that you did not do it, Dick; tell me!"

"Here's the very ticket he drew," says the crazy Beddoe. "Let him deny it if he can."

Dick shrugged his shoulders.

"Mr. Dulcimore," says he, "will ye have my horse brought to the door immediately?"

"Yes, yes," cried Kitty, so wild and dreadful to see that even her mother's heart went out toward her. "Sir Richard is leaving this house immediately, father. He will never enter it again."

And that was a true word, for never again until his dying day did Richard Escombe enter the Manor House at Sherbourne nor think of it but with sorrow for the girlish face he had seen there, pitiful in its woe and doubt—the face that stood to him for all the hope he had in the world.



Book 33

Which Takes us to Windsor and the South



VII

SIR RICHARD GOES TO WINDSOR

IR RICHARD, it will be remembered, was upon his way to London when the great mischance of his life befell him. It is not, however, in the metropolis that we next find him, but at Windsor, where, as the senior Captain of the Guards, he is taking care of German George's property during that worthy's absence, first in his beloved Germany and later on at St. James's Palace.

Now, this is not to say that King George II. had no love for the castle, or that he regarded it with that aversion which characterized his good-natured but imbecile grandson George III. The latter, as we know, would have little to do with either state room or round towers, but builded himself an ugly lodge down by the Middle Ward, and there resided during his long but unfortunate life.

Not so his precise grandfather—that niggardly warrior who counted his guineas with his own hand and knew to a penny what Her Majesty, the sorely tried Catherine of Anspach, spent upon the royal roast beef—he was of another mind altogether. A martinet he might have been, but he had a soldier's heart, and this warmed to Windsor Castle and the grim magnificence of that kingly fortress. Do we not read that he dined in public in Charles II.'s

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famous dining-room; and is there not, over against Queen Elizabeth's library, the very tower which bears his name to this day? George II. loved Windsor beyond all doubt, and it is love of the place, and the sharp discipline he caused to be observed there, that brings us to the next page in our story.

Three months had passed—three eventful months for Richard Escombe. These had given him many things he ardently desired, and not less precious than the others his old commission in the Guards. Say what you will of German George, he loved a soldier, and Sir Richard had been that from his very boyhood. They will show you at Castle Escombe the plans and fortifications he made when a mere lad at school—with its rampart and banquettes, ditch and main ditch, ravelin and covered way, and all the paraphernalia you find in the ancient text-books. Vauban had been a master to his imagination as long as he could remember—he would drill a company of small boys with as great a zest as Corporal Trim built his detached fort of garden mud. And none understood this better than George II., who had dismissed him for a lie, and recalled him when the truth came out.

How it came about that a proper account of the famous club at Medmenham Abbey reached George's ears, history does not wholly tell us. Some say that the Dean of Windsor, a great lover of Irishmen and a particular friend to Richard Escombe, got an inkling of the truth from the boatmen on the river. Others declare that Lord Churchill betrayed the truth at a private table. The matter does not concern us, save in so far as it awoke the old King from his delusion and called Escombe back to his regiment.

As for the Jacobite talk, few even of Sir Richard's enemies

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had credited that. Perhaps, in his heart, Dick cared little for the Guelphs, but he was overmuch a man to be cajoled by the dissolute Charles, and all the evidence went to prove that he had been his antagonist at the French King's Court, and had gone near to upsetting the whole venture which ended so disastrously at Culloden.

This King George knew as well as any man, and, to be just to him, he had no kind of sympathy whatever, bare as the garner of his own morals might be, with such doings as Mr. Wilkes and Sir Francis Dashwood carried on at Medmenham.

When the truth leaked out, when it became known that young Fenton had died by his own hand, and that Richard Escombe had been the only man of that dissolute company to protest against the wickedness, then the King had English words enough to express his anger and to declare that, if there were a recurrence of the scandal, he would march a squadron of the Guards to Medmenham himself and drag out these sorry monks with his own far from gentle hand. For a little while even my Lord Harborne, a man who stood for a party that George was not willing to affront, went in some disgrace. But courts have short memories when royal interests are at stake, and so it came about that Harborne obtained special promotion in London, while Dick went back to the Blues, and took up his soldier's life with no more ado than a man returning from leave of absence.

This is no time to dwell upon the unhappy circumstances of that restitution or upon the melancholy chapter of accidents which robbed it of its first-fruits. Often in his exile had Dick longed ardently for the day which would place him again among his old comrades and open to him

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that delectable land which is peopled chiefly by the soldier servants of the King.

His love for London, for the brightness, the vivacity, and the wit of it stood secondary, perhaps, to a soldier's ambition, but the pair of them were eloquent of regret while he lived in a foreign city, and it was ten times an irony that the realization of his dearest hopes should bring so bitter a disappointment.

Nearly three months now—lovers' months of spring—and no word from Kitty! This would be his daily burden when he got up from his bed and contemplated the duties of his office. Had Kitty's protestations been but a lie, then? She must have heard the truth, he would argue—must have heard it, and repented her cruel haste. That sorry jest, played by a pack of besotted dragoons, could not separate them forever. For his own part, he remembered but that—that she had charged him with a great dishonor, and that he would not answer her a word. Nor was the situation changed a whit when we find him again in his rooms by the Lieutenant's Tower at Windsor upon a sunny May morning just about the hour of the changing of the guard. He had not heard a word from Kitty since he quitted Sherbourne upon that memorable night. Pride sternly forbade him to ask the news which friendly tongues denied him.

Let us open the door at a hazard and peep into that great, bare room with the black walls and the narrow windows looking over the moat toward the Round Tower—an oak table for its chief ornament; a few chairs no better, for the comfort of the occupier. Here we shall find Sir Richard, and here, standing meekly before him, is a prisoner from the guard-room. This man is charged with no less an offence than assaulting three of the dragoons whom George himself

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had just quartered in the town of Windsor itself. Rumor said that a great military review would be held by the King in a few days' time—and this the troopers already anticipated by breaking each other's heads down in the meadows by the river. So one of them comes before the senior Captain and must answer for his misdemeanors.

We shall find Sir Dick but little changed, I think. His fine clothes suit him to perfection; there is still the same bright countenance, not less attractive for the touch of sadness in it. True, the wicked smile about the shapely mouth is there no longer; but he was never a man to wear his heart on his sleeve, and, be sure, a thousand questions would not have dragged admission from him.

"Well, Sergeant," says he, in the old, ringing voice—"and what has this man been doing?"

Sergeant Hall—for that was the name of him—saluted with a click of the heels and a back that would have shamed a plumb-line.

"Trooper O'Flanagan, sir, that was sae drunk the nicht."

Dick permitted the veriest wrinkle of a smile to cross his face.

"Drunk—the old story. Too much small ale, I suppose?"

"Nay, Captain, he tells of the claret."

"Claret! The Guards are certainly improving"; and then to the trooper himself: "Well, my man, so you were drunk last night?"

The trooper drew himself up. With a brogue that cut the very air, he said:

"Sure and I had the honor, sorr—"

"The honor?"

"The honor to drink wid the Giniril."

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"With what General?"

"Giniril Lord Harborne—that I was to fetch from Medmenham wid the ladies."

Now this was utterly unlooked for. Sir Richard, although he was not many miles from the scene, had forgotten Medmenham Abbey—almost the very name of it—but this mention of the place, and the intimation that Harborne still visited it, pricked his curiosity as a knife.

"Oh!" cried he, "I thought your General was in London; and it was he who kept you out, my man?"

"Ay, sorr, 'tis a little bit late the Giniril would be, and not worth the while to go to bed at all. Says ould Mr. Dulcimore—"

"Who?" cries Sir Richard, so loud that you could have heard him across the moat—"who says—"

"Ould Mr. Dulcimore, who give me the claret. 'I apologize for it not being beer, my man,' says he, 'but I dessay you can drink it.' Ay, sorr, it went down like virtue in the book, and here I am for the good of it."

It was humorous enough in all consciousness, and yet Sir Richard had no laugh for it. What a flood of memories burst upon him! Old Dulcimore at Medmenham! He remembered now that Kitty's aunt had a house upon the road to Marlow. She had often spoken of it. No doubt Anthony Dulcimore had gone there from London, and then in Harborne's company to the famous club. The man, then, still visited his Warwickshire friends—he still remembered Kitty Dulcimore.

"Sergeant," cries Sir Richard, turning suddenly upon his heel—"what is the charge, Sergeant?"

"Climbin' the tree in the Dean's Cloister, sir."

"He climbed the tree, and then?"

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"He said he were a bird, sir."
"What kind of a bird, Sergeant?"
"A twa-headed bird, sir—"
"Twa-headed!" Dick repeated it despite himself.
The Sergeant disregarded the interruption.
"And one head was narthing to him at aa'," said he, stolidly.

Be sure that Sir Richard laughed at this, and was at a loss how to answer the pair of them. When he had recovered his gravity, he said to the trooper:

"I see—I see—a little joyous it would be and over-given to the heights."

"Sure, sorr," says the trooper. "'Twas the lady that done it—Miss Dulcimore, that was riding out from London three days ago to meet His Lordship and the others at Marlow."

"Miss Dulcimore?"

"To go to her kinsman's house, sorr. Faith, she turned me head entirely, for, says I, 'tis ould Oireland I'm back to and no foreign countrhy at all."

Sir Richard did not pretend to hear him. His mind was made up, and he quickly came to a decision.

"Sergeant," says he.

"Yes, sir."

"Reprimand this man."

"Will I have him flogged, sir?"

"No, reprimand him—and, Sergeant, see that he does it."

The Sergeant looked as though some one had struck him with one of the ancient halberts decorating the by no means lavish walls of the apartment; but he was too shrewd a disciplinarian to betray his displeasure, and with a "Tension! Left turn! Quick march!" he hustled the delinquent from the room. A moment later Sir Richard sat down to

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his breakfast, for which we shall not be surprised to hear that he had little appetite.

“Barry,” he asked of his flute-playing scoundrel of a man—“has any one been here, Barry?”

“There was a man who said ‘twas of no importance.”

“What was of no importance, Barry?”

“The business that he came upon.”

“But what business?”

“‘Tis of no importance,’ says he.”

“And then?”

“‘Tis the same thing,’ says I.”

“And a very pretty way of dealing with it. Any one else, Barry?”

“I paid the tailor, sir.”

“Is the man still alive?”

“‘Twas after brandy he was asking.”

“As astonished as the rest of them that Dick Escombe’s in England and wears the King’s coat again. Did Captain Beddoe call here by any chance?”

“Indeed and he did, sir. The Governor’s refusing to give him leave, and a rare to do, sir.”

“Won’t let him ride to London, eh, Barry?”

“Not a mile of the road, sir. ‘Tis the King,’ says he, ‘who would have the discipline kept in the castle, and no officer leaves Windsor until the King rides in.’”

“We must make the best of that, Barry. London is nothing to you or to me—’twould be good to remember that—and you play the flute, I remember.”

“Ah,” says Barry, in a melancholy tone, “there’s no justice in this world, sir, and ye’ll get none on an empty stomach. For God’s sake, eat something, master, green habit or no green habit.”

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"Cryptic, upon my life. Did you mention a green habit, Barry?"

"Indeed and I did. Ye can see it in the Cloister garth now. She came with the Dean's lady the half of an hour ago."

Dick laid down his knife immediately, and walked to the window, driven there by that mastering curiosity which the visit of an unknown woman invariably awakes in the mind of a proper man.

Perhaps, for an instant, his heart may have warmed to the belief that a messenger had come to him from Kitty herself, that the days of the pitiful misunderstanding were over and never would be named between them again. If this were so, his subsequent disappointment was the greater. He could espy no green riding-habit about the Lower Ward. Soldiers were going to and coming from the great Round Tower, a petty canon walked idly down toward the park—there were gardeners mowing the lawns and sentries at the gates—but no green riding-habit surely.

"Did the lady give her name, Barry?"

"She spake in five sharps. I mind me of it. 'Tis no name to speak of—Mrs.—ay—Marley. Would ye know the name of Marley?"

"Marwood—you blockhead—would I know her name? Honor Marwood! Say that I will see her now. Go and seek her out, Barry. I'll see her immediately."

"And the Dean's lady, sir?—they came together."

Dick lost all patience.

"Have ye been a soldier ten years that ye must ask me after the Dean's lady—see that the Dean sends for her. Those whom the Church has joined together let no man put asunder—"

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A broad smile crossed Barry's face.
"I'll be the wan for her, sir," said he, and away he went immediately.

Sir Richard, however, continued to stand by the window speculating upon the meaning of this odd visit. Honor Marwood at Windsor—it was too amazing. Memories of by-gone years came rushing back upon him, sad memories of his exile, thoughts more joyous of a splendid youth. He had sacrificed much for Honor Marwood—had she come, then, to thank him, or, after a woman's way, to chide him? He knew not what to think.

How should he have guessed the truth—that this woman came neither upon the first errand nor the second, but for a very human motive in which she would have made Dick Escombe her partner—to his irretrievable ruin and the triumph of his enemies.

VIII

WE ARE INTRODUCED TO HONOR MARWOOD



HE had been a dancer at the King's Theatre, but few remembered the fact since my Lord Harborne had deigned to notice her. A woman of thirty when she visited Sir Richard at Windsor, she still possessed the clear eyes and the pink cheeks of a girl of twenty—nor was her dress such as you would have associated with the playhouse. Indeed, Honor Marwood now chose to dress for a very decorous person, and having become well known to the Chaplain at St. James's—through my lord's influence—here she was at Windsor, arm in arm with the Dean's lady and as devout in her demeanor—while she was still in the Cloister—as any pretty prioress whose motto told of the victories of love.

We grant that there was some little loosening of these ascetic bonds when Barry ushered the lady into Dick's presence. None understood better than Honor Marwood that Sir Richard was a man neither to be deceived by affected piety nor won by a recital of unexpected merits. He had known her at her best and at her worst—as such he must continue to know her if she would win him to her aid. So her air was both jaunty and self-possessed when she met him face to face, and just a rustling of her pretty pink petticoats betrayed the Honor of old time.

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"Sir Richard Escombe," says she—"oh, dear, what shall I say to you?"

"Mrs. Marwood," rejoined he, drawing himself up all his height and wearing that dignity which many have envied him—"Mrs. Marwood, you will begin by telling me to what I am to attribute the honor of this visit."

"Why, to myself, Dick—that is, Sir Richard," says she, "and I'm sure I beg your pardon for the liberty—to Honor Marwood—attribute it to that—and you're just having breakfast, I see. Shall I go away, Dick? No? Then I'll stop; but we've never had breakfast together before, have we, Sir Richard? And it's something that we should be doing it now. I've come here to stop a wedding, Dick, so we ought to have a breakfast, shouldn't we? Well, now, what do you say to that?"

Dick turned to Barry, who stood waiting at the door. "Barry," he said, "in ten minutes."

Barry withdrew muttering; they heard his flute anon over by the Governor's garden which borders the park. When he was gone Dick offered the lady a chair with as much courtesy and gentleness in his manner as he would have shown to any Princess of the Blood.

"'Tis not changed ye are, Mrs. Marwood," says he—"not changed at all in any particular. Will ye be good enough to tell me how ye found me out in Windsor, for, on my life, I'm curious to know?"

Honor did not object at all.

"I came with the Dean's lady. Didn't they tell you, Dick—that is, Sir Richard? I go to church now. Dick, you positively wouldn't know Honor Marwood. In church she's angelic—such a manner of singing, Dick, and, oh! such a little black boy to carry her prayer-book. Well, the

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Dean's lady brought me here, and that's to begin with. She would have come to see you with me, but the Dean's just sent for her. Now, isn't that unfortunate?"

Sir Richard made no admission. Her amusing attempts to save the conventions, her embarrassment every time she called him Dick, her volubility alike amused him. And he had become critical, watching her shrewdly, as a man who had begun to suspect her.

"I last saw you at the theatre at Covent Garden—was it three years ago? You were then about to marry an honest man—your second engagement, Honor, for I may not speak of the other. Is that man dead?"

Honor put her handkerchief to her eyes and feigned a tear—a poor thing that has as much sorrow in its glint as a snake's eye when it is fixed upon a victim.

"Ah, my poor Valentine!"

"Dead?"

"No, Dick, he would be in heaven if he were dead—he's in America."

"And you have become a saint—canonized, it appears, by that venerable father in righteousness Frederick Lord Harborne, whom I flogged on the Mall for young Fenton's sake. Pshaw! and this is chivalry!"

He spoke perhaps more in pity than in contempt, and so Honor understood him. Dick had a warm heart for women, and he did not mean to be the judge of this woman. His frankness encouraged her, and she met it in a similar spirit.

"I'm just as God made me, Dick, and that, as all the gentlemen say, is very beautiful. And I'm pining away for my poor, dear Valentine—though, to be sure, Willy Fenton was the only man that ever I did love in all my life.

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You see, Dick, it's grief that brought me here to begin with. His Lordship was sorry for me. 'Go away a little while to the country,' says he, 'and bring roses back with you.' That's what he said, and you know he is my kind patron, Dick, taking the house at my benefits, and so good to my poor, dear husband, who's in America making his fortune at the plantations. Wasn't it cruel of him, seeing all that's to happen this very week?"

"Concerning your poor husband?"

Honor looked up quickly.

"Not him at all, but Mistress Kitty Dulcimore, whom my lord is to marry to-morrow."

She looked shrewdly at him from the depths of eloquent eyes, but Sir Richard's dignity returned to him in an instant, and he wrapped it about him as a cloak. Let this woman prate of what else she pleased—Kitty's name must be kept out of it.

"What do you know of Miss Dulcimore?" he asked her, sternly.

"That she is to be my lord's wife to-morrow."

"Who told you this?"

"My lord himself."

"You believe him?"

Honor avoided it discreetly.

"Oh, Dick," she cried, "to be drawing her name out of a punch-bowl just as though she were a horse! And she loving you all the while, and going to the—you know, Dick, for want of you. Ah, that's like the Sir Dick of old—upon my poor life it is."

Sir Richard paced the room twice, long steps and slow. When he turned, his face was very pale.

"Why do you bring this hag's gossip here?"

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"Because I don't want my patron to be married, Dick."

"Honest, at any rate. The doves and the carcass—a new rendering. What have I to do with it?"

"But, Dick, you did draw her name in the lottery."

"What have I to do with it?"

"And, you see, Dick, she's been waiting all this while for just one word from you."

"A word from a man she turned from her door?"

"Ah, but that's a woman's way, Dick. She turns you from the door because it's music to her when you knock again. Believe me, little Kitty loves you with all her childish heart. I'd as soon doubt the stars in the heavens as the love of Mistress Kitty Dulcimore for the wild soldier man who hasn't a word to say to her."

Again she watched him with half-closed eyes, a clever woman playing for a great stake; so great that her heart trembled when she reflected upon the consequences of his refusal. Nor did the truly feminine appeal find Dick unresponsive. The cloak of his dignity fell back a little. He began to tell her, and this upon an impulse quite beyond control, that which he had told to no other human being.

"Not a word—you speak truth there," cried he, "and listen to this now. When the King called me back to England to take up my duty again, when all the lies about me were proved to be lies, who should have been the first to tell me she was glad? Will ye be saying Kitty Dulcimore is the person? Well, not a word, by the Lord above me; not a line, as the Heaven is my witness. Then I hear that she is in London. Harborne brings the family down, and they are in St. James's Street. A fine figure of a man, upon my soul, that the King must make a general because he is proved a liar. If you know so much of the affair—

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and my lord has told you, I'll be sworn—you know also that there is a kinswoman to the Dulcimores who has a house by Marlow. Kitty has been there—a few paltry miles from this town, and yet never a word from her. What am I to say when this is told? Is she the mistress to whom ye would carry me? Is hers the affair upon which I am to set out? Not a league, as I live; not a word, though all the rogues in Christendom were to stand husband to her to-morrow!"

He spoke with fine scorn, the burning words of a man who had so long nursed a great wrong that it had become almost an obsession. Truly, Honor Marwood would have been slow-witted enough had she not perceived the very real nature of the emotions which could move such a man to such a revelation. Nay, the sequel goes to prove that she did understand it, and called upon all her resources, as a woman and an actress, to frustrate and overcome it.

"Ah, Dick," she exclaimed, with a fine sigh, "I see plainly that it's all over between you."

"You said, Honor—?" he asked her, almost as one waking from a dream.

"Oh, I said nothing—I was thinking of you. I'm a bad 'un, Dick, down to the very buckles of my shoes," and here she peeped at them. "I'm a bad 'un. That's why I'm here. That's why poor Valentine loved and lost me, and she's to marry my lord to-morrow at the Church of the Savoy, as all the town is saying."

"As you said before, I think—would you have me believe that it is not of her own free will?"

"God save us and bless us, what next—her free will?"

"Then why does she not appeal to her friends?"

"What friends has she? Young Ensign Willoughby

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asked me that three days ago. 'What friends has she?' The boy loves her, and she has spoken her heart to him. Dick, they watch her like a race-horse that is to run at Newmarket—they tell her of a certain obstinate and proud Sir Richard Escombe, and say that he is boasting still of what he did at Warwick. One word from him would upset it all, Dick—just one word—if you would but go to her and look into her pretty eyes, and say, 'Kitty.' There would be no talk about my lord then, believe me. Ah, but, Dick, you'll not be saving her, for you don't wish to, Dick."

"If I wished it, Honor, I could do nothing. No officer may leave the castle this week—the Governor is in London. As senior Captain, I am in command—I dare not leave."

"And if you stay, the dearest little girl in England will be left alone among the villains. Dick, you needn't see her. You could see my lord—for her sake. Ah, Dick, can't you speak one word for little Kitty's sake?"

He was greatly tempted. Never, perhaps, in all his life had circumstance so warred upon that obedience to authority which was the whole of Richard Escombe's creed. The woman's cleverness put a grip upon his very heart. For Kitty's sake—for little Kitty, whom he had loved.

"Impossible!" he cried, his despair unconcealed. "I can't leave the castle, I say. It is the King's command. I should be ruined forever if I went."

"Heigho!" cried Honor, rising, "then love flew out of the window and 'can't' flew in at the door. You always had a cold heart, Dick. The days I would have made love to you, and never got a look for my pains! My lord's born lucky as well as rich, it appears, and the King's an Emperor of Muscovy, who won't believe that men have hearts. She'll



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be my lord's wife before Sunday—in his precious arms, as the writers say—your little mistress, your pretty rosebud, she'll look well in my lord's arms."

Dick cried aloud:

"I cannot, as God is my witness, I cannot—"

And then, as swiftly casting all resolutions to the winds, his eyes ablaze, his heart beating fast with a lover's hope, he turned to her and said:

"By Heavens, I'll go now!"

And that was Honor Marwood's hour of victory. But what it meant to Sir Richard Escombe the subsequent recital must show us.

IX

WHICH TELLS OF A JOURNEY TO ST. JAMES'S



T is not commonly given to the historian to make much of an ironical circumstance, though this surely is the dominating note of many a page which the ages have written.

In Richard Escombe's case it would appear that irony waited upon him often: following him across the seas to France, thence to Warwick and the shires, and again to London, when he set off to St. James's upon that quixotic errand to which a woman had persuaded him.

Consider these facts, and let us reflect an instant upon them. And, firstly, the time of the day—twelve of the morning, as it would appear, and ten minutes exactly before a King's messenger rode into Windsor Castle and asked for no other than Sir Richard himself. Had Escombe lingered but ten minutes—had any kindly fate bidden him stop the messenger as they passed upon the road—well, then, this story had been very different. But Sir Dick passed the fellow by—the pair of them going at a gallop—and on he went to the goal of that misfortune which promised to overwhelm him utterly.

He rode alone. Not even the faithful Barry was at his heels to-day. In his head there ran the hope that sheer

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expedition might save him, that he would ride headlong to town, see Kitty at her lodgings, return as he went, and be again at his post before any missed him. To this end he had left Barry to make the excuses, and mounted upon his great Irish horse Wild Rose, the same that had won the steeplechase at Chester, he galloped as a hunter pursued through Staines, thence straight as an arrow toward Hounslow and his goal.

That is a famous road to-day, but it was otherwise when German George went to and fro upon it between the castle and St. James's. Staines was little more than a village then, Hounslow but an inn and a few cottages, Brentford a wharf for the congregation of bawdy boatmen.

Highwaymen, they say, were as common a sight as the old milestones themselves. You rode at the hazard of your purse; if obstinate, at the peril of your life. Thus it happened that His Highness's coach would have dragoons at the hind end of it like a farm midden to the name of a Scotch worthy; while, as for my lord and her ladyship, they carried the plough-hands for their security, and never failed to arm Jeames with a brace of pistols, which that fellow of the yellow plush would as soon have thought of firing as of boxing his master's ears upon occasion.

Hounslow Heath had then become a scene for every ballad. There were Dick Turpins and Claude Duvals by the score, masked rascals as many as the heather bushes, footpads as abundant as blackberries. Not for the half of his fortune would many a great personage have crossed the heath alone when the sun had set, and, to be candid, such prudence was wise.

It will hardly be necessary to say that Richard Escombe did not care a straw for tradition, and less, perhaps, for

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highwaymen. He rode at the height of the day, lowering clouds above his head and a good horse under him. Such travellers as he passed by, families in chaises and the poorer sort in the public coaches, called after him in vain. What robber would stop a Captain of the Guards who had a good sword at his belt and loaded pistols in his holsters? So Dick gave it no thought at all; none the less, he was still three miles from Hounslow when he became aware that some one followed him at a gallop not less speedy than his own, and, turning, he espied a couple of horsemen well dressed and as decently mounted. These, to his exceeding astonishment, not only followed after him, but had his name as pat as you could desire.

“Sir Richard Escombe—Sir Richard—by the living Jingo—it is Sir Richard!”

Escombe, angry beyond all reason, and perceiving that he could not escape them, permitted the men to come up to him. Had the time been propitious he might have put the right construction upon their presence, but his thoughts were away already to St. James’s, and it was some little while before he recognized the fellows at all.

“Sir Richard, fore gad, don’t you know me, man—Larry Cockraine, of Saint-Denis—are you going to say that you don’t remember the name?”

“And Harry Musgrave, of the Hôtel du Clôitre?” cries the other fellow, spurring on at the word, and coming abreast of Dick, who had reined in, despite his chagrin.

“Gentlemen,” says he, “I remember the pair of you perfectly, but I have an urgent affair in London, and I beg you will excuse me.”

“No, no,” says Larry, “it can’t be more urgent than our own. We must be there by three o’clock if our horses drop.”

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"Taking leave to say so," chimed in Musgrove, "that's exactly what Sir Richard's nag is about to do, by the look of him. Well, it always was a man to ride like a pistol-shot. The more haste the less speed, say I. And a good glass of wine when the inn door is open."

Sir Richard looked down at the lather upon Wild Rose's shoulders, back at the heaving flanks of the willing horse, and began to think that the men spoke truth. Well he knew them. Larry Cockraine, of Saint-Denis, who was the merriest sharper in all the Rue St. Honoré, and Harry Musgrove, who was ever ready to cry "ay" to his partner in roguery. There were hardly two men in England he would less willingly have met upon the road, and yet he saw no escape from them.

"You mean well to me, and I thank you," he exclaimed, with some geniality, "but three o'clock in London will be over late for me."

"He's for the great ridotto at Northumberland House," cried Musgrove, across Wild Rose's back; "all the town's to be there."

"And our old friends from France who have tweaked George's nose. I had it from Anthony Dulcimore, no other, and he apologized for the telling of it."

"Fore gad, there's nothing else to take a man to London to-day," Musgrove went on.

"And three's over early for that affair. I hear the King will not be there until five."

"Better say that he will go when the gardens are lighted. George doesn't like the daylight when the pretty women are waiting for the candles."

And so on, and so on. We may imagine how Sir Richard pricked up his ears at this, and yet, had his normally shrewd

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head not been so full of Honor Marwood's words, he would have seen through the trick in a minute.

"I heard nothing of this affair," says he.

"Then Windsor wants the news badly. Is not the Governor gone up to London to be present at it?"

"He might have told me so; there's no memory of that in my head."

"Then a good horse has put it out. Come, we'll go a little more at our ease. I'm for Northumberland House myself, and if you should wish to come in without a flunkey to name you—"

Dick looked at him hard.

"What's in your head, Larry Cockraine?"

"The gossip of the town and a mischief to a man you have not much love for. Come, we'll talk when we drink—and it will be the starlight after all."

He laughed softly to himself, and, setting spurs to his horse, he set the pace to the tune of Dick's desire, and soon carried them into Brentford. Here they drank a glass of decent claret in a crowded inn, and, resting their horses the half of an hour, they continued their journey about two o'clock, and were at Larry Cockraine's rooms by Covent Garden at three.

"My man shall go across to the Dulcimores' for the news while we get the dust off us," said that worthy, who by his manner might have loved Dick Escombe for his brother. "It's my opinion that your friends will not be in London until nightfall, in which case you will be no worse for a good dinner, nor shall we. Upon my life, Escombe, this was a lucky meeting, as you must admit. But I should have known you out of a thousand, and I never forgot what you did for me in Paris."

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Sir Dick looked at him searchingly.

"Yours is a better memory than mine, Larry Cockraine," said he. "I remember nothing but the guineas."

"Not unkindly, I hope. Well, I had the luck, and now it's your turn. Did you hear of what befell me at the Marylebone Gardens?"

"Not a word of it."

"Your noble friend flung the cards in my face over the table. Well, he's to pay for it. I was riding to Windsor to see you, upon my soul and honor! And there you come, Duval on a charger, across the common, like an answer to my prayer."

"What were you going to say to me, Larry Cockraine?"

"To implore you, for God's sake, to mind your duty at the castle. Harborne's telling the King fine stories. This would be milk and honey to him—but you ride again before midnight, of course? Well, that's as I would wish it. And here's the dinner, which is better. We'll take a hand at the cards for auld lang syne, and go over to the house at nine. You can be at the Governor's door by daybreak, and who'll have a whisper of it?"

"How did you know that I purposed coming here?"

"What my ears have told me. Do petticoats keep silent? The talk goes that he's to marry her next week at the Chapel of the Savoy. I don't answer for it, but I could pretty well guess where my old friend would be when he came to his knowledge. Why, man, the whole court's been looking for you in London these ten days past. And now you're here, and Heaven and Larry Cockraine get you safely back again."

He dismissed it with a fine wave of the hand, as one who should say: "I will make it my business." The affair had

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been so mysterious from the beginning that Dick frankly made no attempt to unravel the skein of it. To say that he believed Larry Cockraine's protestations, or the good faith of that equally notorious rascal Musgrove, is to write him down a fool. But it did occur to him that the pair of them might bear some grudge toward Harborne, and thus pose for the moment as his friends.

As for the programme they made so glibly for him, needs must that he fell in with that. He appears himself to have gone at once to Kitty's lodgings, and having been refused admittance there, to have listened reluctantly to Larry Cockraine. Certainly there did not appear any better opportunity of seeing Kitty than at the great ridotto of which they spoke. Nor could he wisely present himself at Northumberland House alone. So he sat down, half unwillingly, at Larry's table, and afterward, for two good hours, to a fine bottle of Burgundy and a hand at the cards. What did it matter if he lost a few guineas! He must pay for opportunity, and be thankful that it came to him.

At nine o'clock, however, he prepared himself to set out, and, wondering that he was a little confused and dizzy, and not wholly master of himself, he permitted the rogues to call him a coach.

"We shall be in the nick of time," said Cockraine. "And, by the living Jingo! the whole town will laugh at Harborne to-morrow," added Musgrove.

Sir Richard said nothing. The lights of the streets danced before his eyes. He knew that some mischief had been done him, but it was too late to draw back.

X

IN THE GARDENS OF NORTHUMBERLAND HOUSE



NORTHUMBERLAND HOUSE, says the historian, was not built by any Northumberland at all, but by Henry Howard, Earl of Northampton, the son of that Earl of Surrey who was named the poet.

A considerable structure, with a fine front toward the Strand and a noble court-yard, its fair gardens bringing you down to the Thames, where now there are stages for the steamers and great blocks of buildings on land—they ascribe the former glory of it to Bernard Jansen and Gerard Christmat, the architects, though some there be who say that my lord himself had a hand in it, and that the architects did no more than his bidding.

With this contention we are not concerned. The house had been completed by the time we visit it—the fourth side of the quadrangle toward the river having lately been finished; and it was then in the possession of the seventh Duke of Somerset, who had also been created Earl of Northumberland in the year 1749.

A shrewd, able man, the friend of Walpole, and as stout an adherent as German George could number, London owed no inconsiderable measure of her gayety to the Duke, who was a stately leader of the fashions and by no means a woodenhead as a soldier.

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Possessing vast influence, a modest patron of letters, a favorite with the women, His Grace's Whiggish habits of thought opened Northumberland House to many that you would not have expected to find there—and we shall discover an odd company enough when we hurry down the Strand ahead of Sir Richard and his companions, and ascertain for ourselves what is going on upon so memorable a scene.

This, we say, would have been about nine o'clock of a June evening. Already the fine horse-chestnut-trees rustled their leaves to the cool breezes of the lazy river; the heavy clouds of the forenoon were gone by this time, disclosing a clear heaven of stars and that haze of quivering light which hovers above every great city at nightfall. The night would be warm, folk said, but not oppressively so, and that was good news to the army of lackeys groaning already beneath their burdens and driven to their wits' end to gratify the ambitions of His Grace the Duke. Had not their master promised that this affair should put St. James's to shame? Would he not have caused the fame of it to be bruited abroad, so that it might come to the knowledge even of Louis of France, and occasion that amiable personage some chagrin? So the Duke declared—such had been his promise.

And, indeed, the gardens themselves appeared to justify this considerable ambition. Thousands of little lamps decorated the arbors and the terraces. There were fairy dells and alcoves everywhere; nooks for every fair shepherdess who would forget her sheep; shelters for the fiddlers; tables with spotless napery which spoke of much wine and little bread; great terraces ablaze with light; barges moored off the river which are to show you the fireworks anon; lackeys,

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so many that a very regiment might be numbered of them. As for the fine house itself, every casement reflected an aureole of dazzling radiance. A sly peep through the windows revealed crimson carpets and gilded candelabra and shining mahogany and burnished plate—such a spectacle as might not have disgraced the city of the Cæsars in the heyday of her infamy.

Let us walk abroad a little way into this wonderland, and ascertain if any of our old friends are present. We shall hear already the twanging of fiddles in the mock thickets, and espy Master Pan with his pipe—a thirsty soul who will soon be at the wine bottle—but these interest us less than Frederick, my Lord Harborne, upon whom we stumble as we descend the steps of the terrace, and will follow when he goes off with a fellow of low countenance and they discourse apart in a place to which none of the company has yet penetrated. History is silent as to the talk which passed between the two, but we can well imagine how it went and shall venture to guess at it.

“It is true, my lord, as I live,” says the fellow. “Sir Richard rode in at three o’clock, and would still be with Larry Cockraine at his house. I would have made it known to your lordship the sooner had opportunity served, but they told me at your house—”

“Yes, yes,” says my lord, “that is well enough. Cockraine has got him in hand, you say.”

“They met at the inn at Brentford—the accident was as lucky as your lordship would have wished. He suspects nothing but that which we desire.”

“Understand,” says my lord, in a low voice, “if he comes here at all he must not come sober.”

“That would be Larry Cockraine’s affair,” says the man,

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confidently. "Our friend would touch little at Brentford—"

"But he will in London!" cries my lord, almost angrily. "If Larry Cockraine has not the wit to plan it, let him look to himself to-morrow."

"My lord," rejoined the fellow, cringing, "you shall not complain of us. What he does not drink with Larry Cockraine he shall take with your lordship here."

He lifted a shabby hat, and disappeared in the darkness; but my lord crossed the terrace, and would have entered the house but for a sound of voices from one of the arbors by the fountains then throwing a shower of silvered spray upon the warm air. Early to arrive as is the provincial habit, our old friends, the Dulcimores, had taken refuge in this domain of laughter and of light refreshment, and here they related to persons of quality—no others than the famous wits, Lord Churchill and Sir Francis Dashwood—such an account of their private woes as never surely those historic gardens had listened to before. Nor is it necessary to say that the conversation referred to Kitty and her ungracious habit of deserting such doting parents upon any and every occasion.

"Mr. Dulcimore, ye talk like an ijiot," the old lady was saying. "Me fathers were Kings of Ireland, though, God be good to me, me daughter's no such future. Ah, gentlemen"—this to her auditors generally—"if ye knew a poor woman's anxieties to bring such a man to London and to be losing my daughter before I am well in His Grace's house. Now where is Kitty? Dancing, I suppose. And me that was as light-footed as a fairy at her age—me left all alone with the cripples—"

"Foregad," cries Lord Churchill, a fine buck with a

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pretty face—"foregad, my dear madam, I could not believe my eyes when they told me you were not for the minuet!"

"If it comes to that," says Mr. Cunningham, another dandy of the party—"if it comes to that, I'll wager a stone from the Brazils against a Spanish crystal that Harborne himself won't tell us which is mother and which is daughter in such a light."

"Upon my stainless honor," cried Lord Churchill, his tongue so big in his cheek that he could hardly speak a word, "when Harborne brought you in, madam, I congratulated him at once."

Old Mrs. Dulcimore, sweet soul, drank it all in as though it had been a very draught from empyrean heights.

"Ye flatter me, gentlemen," she said, "though 'tis not to say that some have not made the mistake before, and them not wearing the spectacles either. Says I to Lord Harborne this very day, 'If ye marry Kitty,' says I, 'tis her own mother's image you're taking to your bosom,' and that's what many would have done when we were forty years younger, my lord."

A roar of amused laughter greeted this naive confession. In vain old Dulcimore tried to stop his eloquent spouse. She was wound up by this time, and hearing Lord Ailsa's voice as a very peal of bells in the garden, she turned upon him fiercely.

"Ha, Lord Ailsa, my welcome to ye," she cried; "and so you passed me in St. James's this morning!"

"My dear lady, the town air is so bad for the sight."

"Shocking," added Sir Francis.

"But, talking of age," Ailsa went on, anxious to change the subject, "Harborne says he's only forty-nine."

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"And I'm but thirty-eight," says the excited old lady.
"Mr. Dulcimore knows it well."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," interposed Mr. Dulcimore—
"I apologize—this introduction of Lord Harborne's name."

"Oh, Harborne doesn't mind," put in Ailsa; "he'll be
away learning the cotillon with Miss Kitty."

"Every one would be her pupil," said Cunningham,
"but she's only one note. R stands for Richard—eh,
Churchill?—a devilish gamut of an amorous scale, by all
that's erotic!"

"Ah," exclaimed the old lady, "I believe ye would have
me think that she remembers that soldier man still—him
who drew her name out of a punch-bowl and made sport of
her before the people. What are the young women coming
to that they consent to be put up like horses for the huntin'
—at an auction I would tell ye! Sure, if Mr. Dulcimore had
drawn my name out of a lottery, I'd have made him eat it
for his dinner—now, wouldn't I, my darlint?"

"Indeed, my love, and I believe that you would."

The good man sighed deeply as he acquiesced in this
pleasant proposition. The others, however, were mightily
interested in this talk of Sir Richard, and they would not
quit it readily.

"Escombe's at Windsor, and must stay there," said
Churchill. "I remember that this is not the age of the
magic carpet."

"He would ask for a Jacobean ladder—to carry him to
heaven," cried Cunningham.

"And one thing being quite certain—that he will not be
at Northumberland House to-night. I remember that they
are making up the sets for the cotillon," said Sir Francis.
"Of course you lead out Mrs. Dulcimore, Ailsa."

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Lord Ailsa, it is written, would well have foregone this conspicuous honor. He had some command of the various tongues, and he appears, *sotto voce*, to have availed himself of considerable powers of expression at Sir Francis's invitation—but he led madam off, nevertheless, and just as they were going Lord Churchill cried:

“Mr. Dulcimore will join us meanwhile in a little hazard.”

“What!” cries madam, over her shoulder, “me Anthony playing cards! Let me see him, gentlemen! 'Tis no wiser than a little child he is, and no match at all for the quality. Be ashamed of yourself, my lord, to put such a thought into his head.”

My lord, we opine, was in no way ashamed. He waited until this amiable she-cat had disappeared into the ballroom, and then, slapping old Dulcimore upon the back, he cried:

“You owe me something for that, my cavalier. Come, pull yourself together, and I'll show you where His Grace keeps good liquor. What, man, you don't play hazard? Heaven above us, what an infamy!”

The others agreed, and all together, acting the part to which their influential friend Frederick Lord Harborne had assigned them, they dragged old Dulcimore away, and went laughing and jostling amid the brave crowds then beginning to throng His Grace's gardens. The famous ridotto, indeed, was now at its height. Perspiring fiddlers ministered to the antics of galloping crowds. Lackeys opened abundant bottles—the froth of wine ran like the foam of a raging sea—lights shone on pretty faces, many of them masked; the dark places of the gardens whispered the sighs of amorous lovers. A cynic might have said that

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here was a world pursuing a will-o'-the-wisp that it might boast of failure to-morrow. Tragedy went hand in hand with Comedy and laughed while they walked.

And remember that Kitty was there, trying to escape from my lord, and that Sir Richard Escombe already stood within the gardens, Fate touching him upon the shoulder and blank Ruin grinning in his pale face.



XI

IN WHICH KITTY HEARS A PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE



WE have written that Miss Kitty was in the gardens, and if we walk a little way down toward the river Thames we shall discover her upon one of the terraces deep in conversation with our young friend, that merry, love-sick boy, Master Willoughby, the ensign.

They have told us many stories of Kitty since last we met her, but few of them are true or they would not be stories about a woman.

It is perfectly correct to say that His Lordship, that nobleman recently made a general by Soldier George, Frederick Third, Viscount Harborne—it is perfectly correct to say that Kitty has been the object of his amatorial adventures since he first met her at old Dulcimore's house in Warwickshire.

Three months ago this fine figure of a man would have laughed in the face of any one who had named marriage to him, but to-day he would hear the word with tolerance. God knows whether such a rascal had learned to love a pure woman purely. We shall not be his judge. But this is certain, that he would have bartered his very soul—had he remembered the existence of such a trifle—for her possession, and that all the town, which hitherto had derided

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the suggestion, now began to speak openly of marriage. How far Kitty acquiesced in this it is our purpose to show, and we cannot do better than follow her to the terrace where she laughs and whispers with young Willoughby and invariably returns to that supreme topic beside which all others are dull, stale, and unprofitable to the last degree.

"I lose patience," she would say, "and, cousin Willoughby, I do believe that he is following us still."

They peeped together through the leaves, and there espied my lord in an open place by the fountain.

"He's talking to the King," says young Willoughby.

"Telling him of his virtues."

"You can see that both of them are angry."

"Do you think Lord Harborne might die of anger, Ensign? Great men have done that before now."

"He's going off—they're for the house," says Willoughby.

"The other way would have carried him to the river, cousin. He might have walked in—and black, they tell me, is becoming to the complexion."

"You look like an angel in anything, Miss Kitty."

"Like the angel in the stained-glass window who looks down every Sunday upon a poor curate. Have you ever thought how angry painted windows must be sometimes, cousin, when they hear what folks whisper to each other in church? Oh, I can feel for them to-night—"

Her cheeks were afame, her pretty eyes all sparkling. Give old Mrs. Dulcimore her due, she had not stinted the money for a fine gown, and what with the powder in her hair, the patches upon her cheeks, and the fine petticoats which rustled as she walked, Kitty was a picture, indeed.

Had you said she was as happy as she looked, that would have been another story. We know what shadow lay

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upon her life; we can imagine the despair, the longing of her lonely nights, the hours when she cried almost in anguish for a word from Dick. A fair side she showed to the world—her courage forbade even the slightest thought of confession—and there sat Master Pride upon her shoulder, torturing her with that inconceivable malice which woman's enemy, Misunderstanding, never fails to inspire. Even little Ensign Willoughby made but a bad guess at the truth. He almost dared to think—the young impertinent—that Kitty's sighs were for him.

"Would you be angry if Lord Harborne were to marry?" he asked her, naively.

She answered him headlong.

"I would dance until the moon fell down—I would hug him, cousin."

"I suppose a substitute wouldn't do? But, you know, all the town says you're engaged."

"All the town is so wise"—this with a pretty pout.

"And what would Sir Richard say if they told him?"

Kitty froze in an instant.

"You must not talk to me of Sir Richard," she said. "I never wish to hear his name again."

"Then I must not tell you the news—"

"The news—what news?"

"Oh, you are anxious, then?"

"Cousin, cousin—I was ever curious."

"But it's about Sir Richard."

"For pity's sake—"

"He rode into Charing village at three o'clock this afternoon."

Kitty turned as pale as one of the marble pillars which carried the dancing fauns upon the terrace.

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"Why has he come, Ensign? What are you keeping from me?"

"I would not keep anything from you, Kitty, but the Marquis of Repton tells me that it's a trick. They wish to disgrace him before the King, and so they told him some story about you, and here he is in London, when he should not have left his post at Windsor."

Kitty began to tremble—her heart beat so quickly that she must put a white hand upon her bosom and turn away lest little Willoughby should detect her.

"He must be mad!" she cried; and then as quickly: "We must save him, cousin—he must not come here—they will ruin him forever. Oh, the wickedness! Go to him, cousin; say that I command him to return to Windsor this instant—yes, yes—say that Kitty wishes it—that she insists—"

"Do you really mean it, cousin?"

"Ensign Willoughby, if you have ever cared for me, do this for my sake."

The lad sighed deeply, the tears started to his eyes. Ah, if he had been the lucky subject of such thoughts! Yet for Kitty's sake he would go willingly enough. And this he told her at the very moment when my lord, who had skirted the garden in his pursuit of them, came up the steps of the terrace and called out to the conspirators:

"Ensign Willoughby, if you please—"

"My lord!" cried the astonished lad, stepping back a little wildly.

"The Adjutant is asking for one of the junior officers. You will report yourself to him at once."

He grinned at the lad and then at Kitty—a plain indication of his determination to stop this confidential prettiness at once. Willoughby, throwing one appealing glance at the

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agitated girl, went slowly down the steps; but his very manner seemed to say, "I will do it if I can"—and this Kitty believed. Now, for a truth, her courage came nobly to her aid. She could face Harborne with flashing eyes and cheeks afame, and dare him as the Kitty of the old time had done. In her heart she said it was for Dick's sake—for the man who could never be anything to her though she lived a hundred years.

"I have been looking for you for some time, Miss Dulcimore," says my lord, more reserved than ordinary because of her attitude.

"Ah!" cried Kitty, opening her fan impatiently. "I thought that my good-fortune would not long continue, dear lord."

"Then you are unwilling to hear my news?"

"Oh, sure, and it's nothing but the gentlemen with the news to-night. Here's one to tell me your lordship's story and another that of—but what ears I'd have to listen to them all!"

"This news concerns your dear father."

Kitty laughed outright.

"Indeed, and I perceive, my lord, that your charity is all embracing. My poor father!"

He persisted, despite his chagrin.

"There is a vacant appointment to the Household. Mr. Dulcimore much desired the post. I have just heard from Lord Churchill—"

"Ah, then, it's Lord Churchill I am to thank. My lord, your most obedient servant. I will go and do so immediately."

"One moment," cried my lord—and this he said as she prepared to follow Willoughby down the steps—"before

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you hear Lord Churchill it might be wise to hear me—for several reasons, young lady."

"Name one of them, if you please?"

"The reason rides in this day from Windsor—a quixotic errand, and, as you must permit me to say, a very foolish one."

My lord grinned finely when he said this, and showed a pretty set of ragged teeth. Of course he knew that Kitty would stop—he would have been a fool to doubt it for an instant. And stop she did—hesitatingly, with one foot upon the step, her head half turned, her face drawn and white.

"I find it difficult to understand," said she.

Harborne had not imagined this.

"As a rule," he said, "your sex is not so troubled. Benevolence, patience, determination—those are not complex qualities. They are as unmistakable as the sun."

"And does the sun also shine to-night?"

She had come back to him by this time, and there being a great stone bench in an embrasure of the terrace and a fine Eastern rug spread upon it, she did not refuse my lord's invitation to sit; while he plumped himself down beside her and became more eloquent than she had yet heard him, even in Warwickshire.

"The sun is always shining—for clever men and clever women," he said. "We live in the dark because we lack imagination—sometimes because we are merely sentimental. The wise are those who have eyes for the opportunities. Shall I number Mistress Dulcimore among the wise?"

Kitty was in no mood for his epigrams. They say of her that she could be plain almost to vulgarity when any one annoyed her, and there, you see, old Mrs. Dulcimore spoke with Kitty's lips.

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"La, my lord, what's all this to me?" she cried. "Have they not taught me that cats see in the dark? Let's make an end of it, and talk as wise people should. Why have you brought me here? To speak my maiden thoughts—of gratitude for my father's appointment? Am I to say, behold our benefactor? Dear my lord, how quickly will I say it if I may go my way thereafter."

Harborne lifted his eyes to heaven—he was a consummate actor—and the gesture seemed to emphasize the wickedness of her misunderstanding.

"Some day," he said, "you will know me better, Kitty."

"And when may that day be?"

"When you are my wife."

Kitty laughed aloud.

"Oh, here's the news!" cried she.

"Exactly," said my lord, "the news—you will marry me for one of many reasons."

"Always the reasons. The first, dear lord?"

"My name."

Kitty was quite incurable. She continued to laugh—and at the great man's name.

"That which we call a rose—your name! Oh, lud! The second, sir?"

"The devotion, the will to love you."

"Is that benevolence?"

"It is faith in an eternal truth. There is another reason. You desire to advance the fortunes of Sir Richard Escombe."

"So he's to come into it, after all. My lord, spare me his name, I beseech you."

"I would willingly do so, and yet, for his sake and mine, it is impossible. Let me be very honest with you. I can

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make or ruin him. This very night his future may be in my hands. You do not love him, my child, but sentiment keeps you faithful to him. He drew your name from a punch-bowl, and proposed marriage to you because half the regiment would have called him out if he had not. You are perfectly aware of this, and your womanhood resents it. But a certain reserve of obstinacy comes to your assistance. You are angry, but you will not let others be angry. Meanwhile, the whole town is laughing, and will go on laughing, until you take the one step necessary to protect yourself. I offer you that protection—my name, my love. I ask you to be my wife."

Let us be just to this man whom history has much maligned, and say that these sentiments were, for the time being, at any rate, honorable enough. My lord was, in his way, in love with Kitty Dulcimore. Perhaps it was the one pure sentiment he had known in all his life. The wit, the prettiness, the courage of this little country girl had won him, despite his avowed principles, and brought him thus suppliant to her feet. Desiring her madly, secretly afraid that the word would yet be spoken which would recall Richard Escombe to her side, so much afraid of Escombe that he did not dare even to contemplate a deeper infamy, here he was upon his knees at last like any country bumpkin come to London for a wife. And thus Kitty must contemplate him, with what sentiments we can but guess.

She would have been more than human—we admit as much—if this proposal had not flattered her. Great dames had thrown their caps at Frederick Lord Harborne, and seen him tread upon them scornfully. He had a great name, a fine house, the King's favor. These would have won upon the imagination of any girl, and for an instant,

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perchance, they set even Kitty thinking. But this is not to assume that my lord's fate was ever in the balance. To be plain, she was asking herself whether he deserved such a stately answer as the times dictated, or whether she should speak out all her mind as the Kitty of the old time had done. Be sure that it came to the latter. How could it have been otherwise when Kitty Dulcimore was the player?

"My lord," she began, in a low voice, "oh, I know 'tis a great compliment, and you've paid it to so many I'd be out of the fashion without it. But, ye see, dear lord, I've no thought of marrying, for marriage is a great and dreadful state, and not to be entered upon without circumspection. And oh, my dear lord, it was the very last time when you spoke to me at Sherbourn, and after that at Brighthelmstone, ye said you would never utter such words to mortal woman again. And then I said, I'll worship him for his silence and honor him for all his mercies. No, my lord, I'll never marry you, but live all my life in a great big convent across the sea, and you shall come to me in a ship, and we'll talk—yes, we'll talk—about the weather, my lord, for there, surely, we shall agree. Then I'll tell you how sorry I am, and how beautiful my lady is. Will you bring my lady to see me, Lord Harborne? Sure, she'll not be jealous at all of little Kitty in the great black gown and slippers on her feet, and such a white hat that it might cover your lordship's wig. Oh, you'll not be angry, my lord!"

Insensibly, we observe, Kitty had permitted the bantering tone to master her. Perhaps the whole truth was that little Willoughby's news had greatly excited her, and that Dick's name was in her ears even while she answered my lord. Ah, if Dick were but coming to her after all—to

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tell her that the story was a lie; to say that he had never wronged her; to ask her to go with him, she cared not whither, if she might but find a haven at his side.

These were a young girl's thoughts, and it is even possible that my lord guessed them. Certainly he dissembled no more, but, rising when she rose, he said, quickly and cuttingly:

"The jester still—jesting, who knows, with a man's fortune, perhaps with his life."

"My lord!" cried Kitty, flashing at the taunt; but he would not permit her to continue.

"Your friend comes here to-night," he went on; "that is not my doing. Acquit me of blame if misfortune attends him. I am going now to speak to the King, when we have found your amiable father. Miss Dulcimore, your obedient—"

His tone was wholly ironical; his unspoken threat moved her greatly. There he stood in the moonlight, bejewelled, laced, and powdered, his hatchet face wrinkled into odd smiles, his ferret's eyes blinking upon her. But Kitty appeared to have forgotten his very existence. Turning swiftly, she ran down the stone steps and disappeared into the garden.

Sir Richard here at Northumberland House! How the blood raced in her young veins! What ardent hopes of her love came back to her as she repeated the words!

For, if it were true, Dick had dared all for her sake, and his reward should be that which alone would satisfy a lover.

XII

THE KING DETERMINES THE ISSUE



HE went quickly from place to place in the gardens, happening upon many odd scenes and discovering familiar faces everywhere.

It was ten o'clock by this time, and not only had a good deal of water flowed under Westminster Bridge since the affair began, but a great deal of wine had been spilled upon the verdant carpets which were the boast of His Grace's gardeners.

Men and women took their pleasures upon the crest of the wave in those days. Life was too serious that it should be governed seriously. Of religion there was barely a capful to go round. To ride, to drink, to make love—here you had the recreations of an English gentleman. The women practised but a single art—that of not being single. The male diversions were the wars in Germany, and passion expressed in an impossible tongue.

Kitty discovered many of these great people at Northumberland House while she ran quickly from place to place seeking her lover. Now it would be a bishop's party discussing Master Wilkes; anon a group of Whigs wondering what they were worth, in good guineas, to Sir Robert; again, half a dozen of malcontents asking after the tables for the hazard. Arbors apart revealed amorous lovers

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cursing intrusion and sighing so that the very leaves were envious. Here you would have a tipsy rake maudling sentiment, there a leering grand dame giving encouragement to a lad young enough to be her son. Wine was everywhere; the lackeys fell over one another as they carried the flasks; the fiddlers beat their instruments so lustily that the whole spirit of music must show weals of the flogging. Of restraint or sober merriment there was little. A babble of voices, a whirl of skirts, a clash of cymbals, a clink of glasses, gold and silver and jewels flashing wherever lights stood, gallants in amorous dalliance, politicians talking corruption, old women lisping Ovid—such was His Grace's party as Kitty beheld it.

Be sure she had eyes which fell critically upon but few of these things. How her pride had fallen since my lord spoke to her upon the terrace! Woman bends to sacrifice. She is no stern confessor. Just whisper in her ear, "Pec-cavit" a "Mea culpa," and the first verb that we learn at the schools, and up goes her hand in absolution and sweet is the kiss of her peace. Kitty would forgive Dick—what woman would not have forgiven him? Had he not ridden in from Windsor against the King's order, risked all his new-won honor, cast every shilling of his soldiery fortunes into the scale, that the price might purchase forgiveness? Kitty, on her part, would go to him and ask, "Dick, why did you do it? Why did you shame me at Sherbourn?" And he would have a gentle answer for her, an answer for which she had long waited—an answer which would satisfy her.

This she believed as she went through the gardens. If a shadow hovered upon her, it was that of her own fear. Might they not punish Dick beyond all reason for what

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he had done? Might not the King punish him? She had heard dreadful stories of that virtue they call obedience. Dick had disobeyed the King's order, and must answer for it. Yes, but how? Could it possibly be true, as a voice whispered to her, that he might have to answer with his life? No, no, she said as quickly, that would only be at the wars. And if not with life, with what then? Liberty, said the voice; he must answer with his liberty, or, perhaps, with the further penalty of a public shame, greater than any he had known before, and irrevocable.

Here was something to quicken a young girl's step if you will—something to send her on madly, fearing the shadows and desiring the light. She must find Dick and warn him. God help her! How she found him; what a discovery it was!

Let it be said that she heard his voice even before she came out upon the scene. A considerable pavilion had been set up on the Strand side of the gardens—one which would shelter the King when His Gracious Majesty deigned to appear. A Persian carpet had been spread before its door. There were small tables all about, and fine flaring lights and a thousand colored lamps set as jewels about the trellis. To this pavilion Kitty came, but not directly, so that, approaching it from the south, the bushes hid the open place from view, and she might have passed it by altogether as too public for her quest but for a loud peal of laughter and then a ringing phrase that was very music to her ears:

"Kitty—I tell you I will see Kitty."

She heard the words, heard them as a sweet song long forgotten, and asked no other message. A little path carried her swiftly to an opening in the yew fence. She thrust the bushes aside, and, coming out boldly, she met

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her lover for the first time since that night at Sherbourn when she had told him that he must never enter her father's house again.

Now, Dick was resting by the door of the pavilion and a group of our old friends stood round about him. He wore his soldier's clothes, his hat lay on the floor at his feet, his left hand, stretched out to touch the post of the door, supported him, for he was sick and dizzy beyond all words.

Of those about him, Lord Churchill and Mr. Cunningham, the fat fop, were the most conspicuous, but Sir Francis also was there, and some of the company that we have not seen before. These, be sure, knew nothing of the sorry trick that my lord had played upon Sir Richard, nothing of the wine in the glass which now threatened to fall from his feeble fingers. They said that he was like many another there, intoxicated by good liquor and full of His Grace's hospitality. And we shall leave them with their opinion, for Kitty concerns us, and God alone knows what Kitty thought.

This her Dick, this man with the thickened speech and the rolling gait and the bloodshot eye? This man who laughed and swore in a sentence, whose voice was terrible to hear, whose words were a very madman's jargon! Oh, God help Kitty! we say, for how should she have understood, and what man among them all would take pity upon her and tell her?

Listen now to Sir Richard as he reels yonder an appeal to that scornful company. Robbed of his right senses, raving hysterically, he is trying to tell them how he made the journey to London.

"And there," cries he, "and there they made a mistake, for 'twas Dick Escombe that must go. Gentlemen, I'm

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much obliged to you all. I am powerfully your servant. 'Tis to Windsor I must return this night, as His Majesty the King commands me. That's why I have just told my venerable friend Harborne—jolly old Nobbs, we have drunk a good glass together—to Windsor, my lord, if the heavens fall, for what would little Kitty think of me if I forbear to go? And, ye see, the Dean's lady came to breakfast with me— Mrs. Marwood, to what am I to attribute the honor of this visit—to what am I—"

He swayed a little, for the drug that was in the wine which Harborne had just offered him acted both quickly and potently. Among mere vulgar people many would have pitied the man, perceiving his condition, and would have judged him lightly. But these gentlemen of the periwigs, my ladies of the patches, to them the spectacle was better than any comedy at the King's Theatre. Richard Escombe deserting his place at Windsor, they said, and appearing before the King in such a state! How the town would ring with the story to-morrow! Dick meanwhile, as white as death and dreadfully ill, his brain fired by the poison he had drunk, went on raving just as a man at the crisis of an illness. And as he raved, his old friend Harborne watched him with such a pretty smile that society talked of nothing else for many a long day afterward.

"Sergeant, reprimand this man, and see that he does it. I must be in London, to-night, Barry. I must find old Anthony, the damned old rogue. D'y'e hear me, Barry? Ask Captain Beddoe to step across and see me. Did ye think I was in ignorance? She's at London with Harborne. Ha! ha! and I drew the name from the bowl. 'Twas like a woman to be minding it. Lord Harborne, your obedient servant. I am pleased to meet you here. Old Nobbs!

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Ha! ha! I've come to report myself, my lord—come to report myself."

He had the palm of his hand flat against the wood-work of the trellis by this time, and would have slipped and fallen had not some one pushed forward a chair that he might sit. For some of the women the spectacle already proved too much, and they crept from the throng; but Kitty could not tear herself away, although every right instinct bade her begone this instant. The very shame and degradation of it all held her to the spot as though a spell had fallen upon her. And this was her Dick, remember; this the man for whose sake her pillow had been wetted by her tears—ah, how many nights since he had left her; this the hope of her young life; this the hour of her sweet forgiveness and reconciliation! Shall we judge her if despair gave place to anger, and anger almost to hate? Oh, the infamy of that degradation! And would she submit to it as one that Richard Escombe had the right to insult at his pleasure? Assuredly not, or this story had never been written.

Remember that she stood in the press of the crowd, and might well have passed undiscovered there. Unhappily for her, there was a man present who was determined that this should not be. And he, his eyes searching every face, discovered her at last, and made her presence known in such a tone of malice and triumph that she would remember it above all else in her knowledge of that man's life. Harborne, indeed, committed a tactical blunder which we had not expected from such a man. He might readily have delegated his so-called duty to another, despatched one of the officers to have informed the King, or even permitted His Grace to do so. But no, nothing of the sort. This triumph was his own; his tongue alone should proclaim the good news.

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“Lord Churchill,” cries he, suddenly, in a voice that carried far over the gardens, “I must speak to His Majesty. Oblige me by conducting Miss Dulcimore from this place.”

He took a step toward her, and there stood Kitty, conspicuous among them all, her face so white that the cruellest must pity her, her eyes shining like diamonds, her lips compressed.

“My lord,” says she, proudly enough, “when I have need of Lord Churchill’s protection I will ask for it myself.”

What Harborne would have answered her we cannot tell. The movement, as you would expect, had awakened Sir Dick from his lethargy. He straightened himself up; he rocked upon his heels. You could see the very veins in his forehead swelling while he fought the drug and strove to regain his dulled senses.

“Kitty!” he cried, as a man speaking the whole anguish of his heart—“Kitty!”

Oh, be sure that Kitty heard him. They say that the fire in her eyes might have blinded a braver man than Richard Escombe when she answered him, not directly, but to Ensign Willoughby, who had crossed over to her side.

“There is a man whom the Duke’s lackeys should flog,” cried she. “Mr. Willoughby, will you please show me where all the gentle-folk have gone?”

And so she walked away from the scene, her hand upon the lad’s arm, her head erect, slowly, without one word or sign that this meant more to her than to others who were gathered there. Well for her, we say, that she delayed no longer. Was not Escombe actually at grips with his enemies by this time? A very frenzy of anger overtook him. Strong arms endeavored to hold him, but were thrown off as though

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they had been the arms of children. He raved incessantly, the mad words of one whose brain was on fire.

"Stand back!" he roared; and again to a midget among them: "Stand back, ye little devil of a man. Would ye keep me from Kitty? I tell ye I see her over there, man. She's where the red roses are growing. Stand back, and let me go to her! Will ye have me blind? 'Twas Kitty or her own sister, which is herself, by my soul!"

And then rocking impotently upon his heels as stronger arms wound about his own, he went on:

"'Twas not Kitty at all. I see it plainly. The ould divil of a horse won at Chester, and I must be riding over to tell her. And, mind ye, I met Cockraine upon the road. Where's Cockraine? I won money of Cockraine. God, I shall be late at Charing yet! Twenty miles to Kitty, twenty to tell her! What's Dick Escombe going to tell her—what—what?"

His voice fell to a whisper, and he closed his eyes as though memory must rack every nerve and then leave him helpless after all. A physician would have said that the more cunning potency of the drug was passing, and that he would come by reason presently. It may be that some of those who stood by realized this, for they dealt more gently with him, and one of them cried: "Sir Richard, come! Don't you understand?" To which he answered with a kindly smile and a new attempt, as painful as the others, to gather his scattered wits.

"Ye see, I won little Kitty in the lottery—I drew the paper out of the bowl. And then they said I must marry Kitty or the regiment would draw upon me. I was frightened of them—Dick Escombe frightened of the little spaldeen of a man!—and there was that in my heart I would not tell, the

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breath of the roses over the river, the morn of the sun upon my face because Kitty called me. Faith, child, 'tis your face I see—as I've seen it all my life—the dream that will never be waking. Kitty, I see you in the dream—”

Had they been merely human the pathos of this might have won upon the pity of my lords, to say nothing of the meaner folk. Judging them lightly, we must admit to some effort upon their part at least to save the dreamer from the ultimate consequences of his folly. Lord Harborne, they knew, had gone away to make the episode known to the King. The shame of the drug might pass—but the shame of a public arrest, of a public degradation, would never pass. The very tension of the scene moved them to quick exclamations and new efforts.

“Get him away, for God's sake!” cried Cunningham.

“The King will charge us all,” says Lord Ailsa.

“Such a pretty affair is too good to last,” put in Lord Churchill.

“Make an end of it,” says another; “pick him up and carry him.”

Wise advice, but not easily to be followed in Richard Escombe's case. Fitfully as fever will have it, his moods changed with surprising quickness. At one moment recalling some dream of his love, at the next anger returned, and he seemed to remember every circumstance of the day.

“Where's Cockraine?” he asked, with a sudden leap to his feet and a wild stare about him.

None answered him, and his withering gaze fell upon Lord Churchill.

“Ye have the look of that same man,” he cried, with a savage laugh; and then: “Ye devil, what wine did Harborne give me? Why did we drink at this house?—rascals

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that you were—damned rascals. I'll teach you something. Draw upon me, I say, draw upon me—”

And swiftly from the word he passed to the deed. Now at last had he a trembling hand on his sword, and would have drawn it. No one had anticipated this—none thought of what might justly follow a jest upon such a man; but the mere movement caused such an uproar as the old house had rarely known before. Lackeys came running with lanterns; great dames implored their cavaliers to save them; young girls turned and fled from the scene. And above all the uproar there was bruited the rumor that the King was coming. Verily it needed no seer to say that Richard Escombe was ruined irrevocably, and that no human agency might save him.

“The King! the King! Make way for the King!”

XIII

ENTER HIS MAJESTY

N hushed whispers men—and women, too—uttered the words, and drew aside with a curious longing to see and hear all that was done and spoken. When His Majesty at length entered that tragic arena he found Richard Escombe drinking from a great goblet of water that little Ensign Willoughby had carried him, while of those who had put shame upon him Lord Churchill and Mr. Cunningham alone had the courage to remain. Be sure, however, that Frederick Lord Harborne was present, treading upon George's heels and whispering still his counsels of arrest.

"Your Majesty's own orders—no officer to leave the castle upon any plea whatever. As a general of the staff, I feel it my duty to bring this to your knowledge. Your Majesty will be the judge of Sir Richard Escombe's condition—"

"I shall be the judge," said the King. He spoke very quietly and with a meaning my lord failed altogether to perceive. "I shall be the judge. Take me to the place."

And so he burst in upon them—and there is Sir Richard standing with pale face and unsteady hand; and there is little Willoughby, looking very white and frightened; while

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all about in the shadows are craned necks and wide eyes and the shimmer of jewels and the black of patches and the crimson of cheeks which owe little to nature. What a moment for Escombe! What an hour of jesting fortune!

“There is the man!” cried Harborne, magnificently.

The King nodded his head.

“Sir Richard Escombe!” he cried.

“Your Majesty.”

A murmur of astonishment rippled round the wide ring of faces. What miracle had happened, then? Was this the man report had made a drunkard and insane? Behold, he stands upright before them all; his face is ghastly pale, but reason has returned to him, and with reason, dignity.

“Your Majesty,” he repeats.

The King advanced another step, and put a question.

“With whom did you ride into London, Sir Richard?”

“With Lord Harborne’s friends—Mr. Cockraine and Mr. Musgrove, sir.”

“And after that? But I perceive you have been drinking, Sir Richard. Was that with my lord also?”

“A health to Your Majesty on a glass of wine—but one, upon my honor. There’s been that between us, sir, which wine may well blot out. I drank to a reconciliation—but one glass, upon my honor.”

“Ah!” cried the King, in a strange tone. The expectancy of those about was now stretched as a bow. This ruined man, how well he carried himself! And the King’s anger—they waited for that to fall. My lord surely had never known an hour of triumph so precious to him.

“Ah!” said the King, in a strange tone—he was looking at Harborne closely now, as one who meditates a possibility

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—“but a single glass to my health? That is a very proper account to give. It is also a little perplexing, Sir Richard. But one glass—”

He walked toward the little table set toward the pavilion door, and held up a decanter from which the wine had been poured.

“Is this the flask, Sir Richard?”

“It is, Your Majesty.”

“Ah! Then my lord shall drink to me also. What is more right and proper than that? Come, my lord, a health to His Majesty. You will not refuse me that?”

He poured out a glass of the Burgundy, and offered it to the amazed nobleman. They say that Harborne’s face was a study for the painters. And, mind you, men and women too read the King’s cleverness as in a flash of a merry light. Ah, this far-seeing old soldier, George—he knew, he knew!

“Come, my lord! Do you hesitate? A health to me. Am I to say that you are not willing?”

“I have drunk the toast already, Your Majesty.”

“And will drink it again at my command—that, sir, or an alternative I will not name before this company.”

A soldier spoke now—a king to those who must obey. The people pressed about as though this were the crisis of an act in the playhouse or the final scene of a stirring comedy. As for my lord, he trembled in every limb. Lord, what a trap to be set for him! The wine—it seemed to mock him as the glittering eyes of mischievous imps. What could he do?—what answer make to a King *who knew?*

“Do you hear me, my lord? Will you drink a glass of wine to my health, or must I name the alternative?”

Harborne lifted the glass and drank it slowly. The drug

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ran like an opiate in his veins, for it was that and nothing more. For a moment, all waiting in breathless silence, the man stood rigid as a figure of stone before the company. Then, reeling, he lost his balance and fell as an inanimate thing at the King's very feet.

“Ahl!” cried His Majesty. And then, raising his voice so that all might hear, he said:

“My messenger rode at daybreak to bring Sir Richard Escombe to London. I see that he has not been fairly treated. Lord Churchill, command an apartment to be prepared for him. I will hear Sir Richard in the morning.”



XIV

WE GO TO DINE AT ST. JAMES'S



AN Old Man has remarked in the diverting tragedy of "Macbeth" that a falcon, towering in her pride of place, was by a mousing owl hawked at and killed. Which considerable misfortune, we take it, is put before us in lieu of many an ancient aphorism, but chiefly that which reminds us that pride goeth before a fall.

Now, there are many remarkable coincidences in the story of Sir Richard Escombe, but none more remarkable than that of the circumstance to which he owed his social salvation upon the day he set out from Windsor—and the consequent fall which attended the pride of a very notable personage.

Consider the case in all its bearings. Here is the senior Captain of a regiment who has reminded a junior how impossible it is to leave the castle, and upon that immediately has left it himself, despite the King's order and the fulminations of a discipline-loving Governor. This Captain goes to London; is met by rascals on the way; is drugged by them and my lord—and even then it is not the poor owl that is grassed, but the proud falcon whom all had considered to be invincible and so high in the heavens as to be beyond the gaze of mere mortal folk. A wonder of coin-

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cidence—and yet no great wonder at all when the whole truth is told.

Of course the King had sent for him. German George was too much of a soldier to have acted as he did had his own summons been a fiction. He had sent for Richard Escombe, who was the finest judge of a horse in the three kingdoms, that he might come to London and there settle a wager between His Majesty and the Duke of Sefton concerning the history of a famous thorough-bred, and that which it had, or had not, done upon Newmarket Heath.

A King's messenger riding headlong arrived at Windsor ten minutes after Sir Dick had quitted the castle. He, worthy man, believing that His Majesty's intentions had been made known by some other means, and satisfied that Escombe had indeed gone to London, merely turned his horse about and went back as he had come. His task was accomplished, and making doubly sure by inquiries at the inns, he arrived at length at St. James's, and there put the story abroad. So, it appears, that worthy George never had a doubt about the matter. Sir Richard had come to London because he had been sent for. And lucky for him that he came—for this was not a King to be trifled with.

From such a beginning the sequence of our story follows naturally enough. At Northumberland House His Majesty heard Harborne very patiently, but with a certain contempt nevertheless. He liked zeal, but from tittle-tattle he had an aversion which was not to be disguised. So he let my lord babble as he would; and, not deigning to inform him of the truth, went himself to meet Escombe. In what condition he found him—a man recovered, it is true, from the madness of the drug, but weak and faint and ailing—you have already heard. Indeed, we find that the King sent a

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message presently excusing Sir Richard until the morning, and that, a great revulsion of feeling attending the discovery of the royal favor, stanch friends carried the dazed man to a lodging in the Haymarket and there left him, with strict instructions to a garrulous landlady that her guest must repair to the palace very early upon the following day, and by no means neglect to report himself to His Majesty.

Here in this lodging at ten o'clock of the following morning Sir Dick opened his eyes after a heavy night of sleep; and hence he went to the palace in answer to the royal command. Used to the regal mood, he was somewhat astonished to find the King surly beyond ordinary, and overmuch given to the German tongue, which Sir Richard understood but ill. The interview, we read, was of the briefest—George asked many questions concerning the horse, made some blunt observations upon the lax discipline among his Guards, and finally dismissed the affronted Captain almost as though he had been a place-hunter who had obtained admission to the palace by a ruse. Escombe knew the King well, and this curt treatment did not overmuch depress him. A believer in the old proverb concerning a prince's favor, he had hoped little from the Guelphs, perhaps desired little; and even when His Majesty, as a parting shot, commanded him not to leave London until he was ordered so to do, the words were no surprise.

“ ‘Tis to belabor the Guards,” he said to himself; “ perhaps to speak of the great review. Well, London is as good as any other place, and better while Kitty is in it. This day will I go to her and tell her the truth. She may have heard what happened to me yesterday—no pleasant tale as others would tell it. I'd be more than a madman did I not go to her at once.”

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Here was a proper resolution, beyond all question—but it is one which makes much clear to us. No shadow of a doubt can now remain concerning Sir Dick's knowledge or want of knowledge of the supreme misfortune which happened to him yesterday. Why, he was ignorant even that Kitty had been at the assembly—and although some dim recollection of a dark hour hovered in his mind, what the nature of it had been he knew no more than the dead. In this ignorance, however, he was not long to dwell. Little Ensign Willoughby met him on the very threshold of the palace (for that fine boy had now become a gentleman to one of the princes), and, taking the Captain aside to his own room, he begged for a brief hearing.

"You know that she has left London, Sir Richard," he began, for never could Ensign Willoughby hold his tongue.

Dick stared at him in wonder.

"Would you be speaking of Mrs. Marwood, Willoughby?"

"Indeed no, I would tell you of Miss Dulcimore."

"'Tis a surprise altogether. What road has she taken?"

"I have done my best to find out, but I cannot discover the truth. It is Harborne's doing. He visited their house in St. James's this morning, and I hear that they all went away in one of his carriages during the forenoon."

"In one of his carriages?—then old Dulcimore is becoming the fine figure of a man entirely. Would ye have me to believe that Harborne went with him?"

"He rode as far as Tyburn Gate—I wish he had been engaged there, Sir Richard."

"Ay," said Dick, with a sudden inspiration, "he's a house in Buckinghamshire, I remember—not far from the Quaker people at Jordans. What would the Dulcimores be wanting there now?"

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Willoughby was somewhat at a loss.

"Kitty would be very angry," he said, with hesitation—"perhaps she wished to leave London. There is a lampoon already sold on the streets, Sir Richard—"

Escombe looked at him shrewdly.

"I remember little of last night," he remarked, a strange chill of apprehension seizing him. "Be plainer with me, Willoughby."

Ensign Willoughby stuttered and stammered, hummed and hawed, talked a good deal about this person's actions and the other's—and finally permitted every word of the sorry business to be dragged from him. When he had done he was in no way surprised at the sudden gust of anger which overtook the amazed Sir Richard.

"What!" cried he, "I am sent to her like a drunken lout from an ale-house—I reel about the gardens before the people, you say! God in Heaven, send me to those who did it! Ye hear me, Willoughby, I will not sleep in my bed till Kitty knows and these men are punished. Oh, think of it, man—to play me such a scurvy trick, and my head so gone that I remember no more of it all than the King's favor and the water you carried to me at the pavilion! But, Willoughby, I have a good sword to my hand—my pride is not other men's, and, as there is a sun above us, I will make them answer to me."

Willoughby thought it wise to say nothing. He had the sheet of the lampoon in his pocket—half the town already had laughed at it—but he would not have shown it to his friend for a hundred pounds.

"I very well understand your displeasure, Sir Richard," said he; "it is but natural and proper. And, as you will

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readily imagine, there are many to say why Harborne has gone into the country."

"Think you 'tis to keep out of the way?"

"It will be said, whether or no."

"But I will follow him, Willoughby—I will follow him to the Indies; see now."

"The King is determined that you shall not. That's why he gave the order which keeps you in London."

"Then I'll resign my place—is it no justice that I am to find, even from the King? Oh, I'll go to him—I'll go to him this minute."

"I shouldn't do that, Sir Richard. He must guess how things are—better wait until you have his word."

It was common-sense, though spoken by a boy to a man—and it prevailed, as common-sense often will when anger permits it a hearing. Reflection taught Escombe that nothing would be easier than to tell Kitty the true story of the affair—and more than this, his consuming anger against the author of his misfortunes made explanation a lesser consideration. When he returned to his own rooms he was a calmer man, but his purpose was clear. He would follow Harborne wherever the journey might carry him. Nothing must intervene—he would accept no reason whatever, hear no counsel, be bribed neither by promises nor flattery. Twice in his life had this fine villain put shame upon him. Richard Escombe swore by all he held dear that there should never be a third occasion.

The resolution comforted him, and, much to his satisfaction, he welcomed his servant Barry about three in the afternoon, and learned that the good fellow had followed him into London with a change of linen directly he learned that his master would not return to Windsor. Barry rarely

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asked a question, but he was a little curious this afternoon, and broke in upon his customary silence.

“Do we bide long, sir?”

“The King will tell us, Barry.”

“And after that, sir?”

“We are going a journey, Barry.”

Barry raised his eyebrows.

“Into the wild man’s country?”

“No, not to Scotland, Barry—unless the man goes there.”

“Tis glad I am to hear ye speak of a man—there are few in these parts, sir.”

“No lover of town—you’re not that, Barry.”

“Whist! A man who comes out of Ireland leaves his heart behind him.”

“But not his flute. Go and see who is asking after me. I hear voices below.”

Barry went at once, and barely a minute had passed before he ushered in those two old friends of ours, Lord Churchill, the supercilious, and the fat fop, Mr. Cunningham. These men had come direct to Sir Richard from the King—diplomatists both upon a delicate errand—but they would not have admitted as much if you had offered them a thousand for the news.

“Sir Richard Escombe, your most devoted—”

“Sir Richard Escombe, upon my life we are fortunate—”

Dick bowed to them both, and told Barry to send up wine. He knew perfectly well why these men had come to him, but was as ready to dissemble as they. In the streets and the salons last night’s affair would be discussed openly, but not between those most closely concerned in it.

“We are,” says Lord Churchill, with a great show of

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politeness—"we are, Sir Richard, to command you to the palace to-night."

"To dine," says the fat Cunningham, "at half-past five precisely."

Again Dick bowed.

"Gentlemen," he rejoined, "I am powerfully obliged to you both. And is that all the news you are bringing me?"

The men exchanged quick glances, but Cunningham spoke next.

"In a general way, yes," he answered, with a shrug, "but I may say, as between those who will make no further mention of it, that a certain exalted personage is much upset to-day, Sir Richard."

"Being greatly annoyed by certain matters which have come to his ears concerning an affair I need not name."

Dick made no reply, and, encouraged so far, Lord Churchill continued:

"He can say nothing for himself, naturally so—but we, who are the ready interpreters of our distinguished friend's thoughts, we surely may hazard an opinion."

"Which is devilishly unfavorable, I must say," added the ready Cunningham.

And so that delicate comedy began, Cunningham nodding his head while Churchill spoke, and Churchill saying "Quite so" whenever his friend opened his lips. Dick, on his part, was quite content to listen. He thought that he knew all that was coming; but in this he was mistaken, as we shall see presently.

"You will admit, gentlemen, that I have been greatly affronted," he said.

They admitted it together.

"Exactly what our noble friend has said. I think he

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used those very words, eh, Cunningham? Did he not say 'greatly affronted'?"

"You have a wonderful memory, Churchill—the very words. But you are forgetting his reference to consequence. Consequence, I think, should attend affront."

"And that which the town would think and feel if there were not upon both sides some willingness to avoid—at any cost—the association of this affair with the common rules of discipline among those who serve a generous master."

"You put it very well, Cunningham. I think our friend would not object to that as a fair statement of his views—that consequence shall be apart from circumstance—touching no point of discipline and not to be permitted if it be known. And this leads me to say that I am forgetting a part of the King's message. Twelve o'clock to-morrow night was the time named, I believe. Sir Richard to be at the castle by midnight to-morrow."

"Ah," cried Dick, who now began to make some sense of their powerful jargon, "the King gives me until to-morrow night, I perceive?"

"To be at Windsor punctually—after which, should the former conditions be unaltered, they are to remain so."

"Adding only an assurance of His Majesty's interest, however it may befall."

They had said all there was to be said by this time; but for the form's sake they lingered yet awhile, talking nonchalantly of the affairs of the day; their *bonnes fortunes*; their luck at the tables; the pretty women who interested them and the plain women who did not. When they were gone they bequeathed to Dick such a mystery of words spoken and left unsaid that none but a master in diplomacy would have made head or tail of it. He, however, read the

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King's meaning as clear as though it had been written down in a child's book.

"I am to have until to-morrow night. The King gives me grace until then. And there is to be no meeting in public. He knows, then, that Harborne has ridden into Buckinghamshire and means me to follow him. Ay, and I'm all for such quarry—but if I find him not, then there is no more of it, and George himself will hold the scales. 'Tis a shrewd man entirely—God forgive him for asking me to dinner this night."

This appeared to be the price he must pay for the gracious intimation that he might defend his honor even against a superior officer and a general of the staff. He went to the palace, none the less, with a light heart—and when he was gone the King said, "God help the man whom he rides down"—and meant every word of it.



Book 333

Of Jordans but not of the Quakers' House





XV

THE ADVENTURE WITH THE GYPSY



It was ten o'clock that night when Sir Dick rode out of London; a quarter to twelve when he entered the little town of Uxbridge upon the Oxford road, and asked his way to Jordans at the posting-inn of the place. Here he drank a glass of hot wine—for the night had fallen chill—and delaying no longer than served the mournful Barry to bestow a melancholy kiss upon a merry maid, the pair set off again, as uncertain both of their destination and their surmise as any couple upon the King's high-road that night.

To discover Harborne; to bring him to account; to tell Kitty the truth of the affair—these were the thoughts which banished others, and compelled Sir Richard to ride a willing horse a little brutally.

Wounded in his pride, made the laughing-stock of a callous town, Dick Escombe was not the man to suffer in silence until opportunity presented itself—not the man to nurse his resentment or feed upon a hope of a future day. Hot within him, this desire of swift revenge prevailed above his anxiety that Kitty should know. Time afterward to tell her—time to say, the man did this while he was alive, but to-day he is dead. And here you had the Celt to the

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finger-tips—lavish in his affection, mighty in his pride, unrelenting in his enmity. Dick swore afterward that he could have slashed the very trees as he rode by. Harborne's face was ever before him. He looked into the man's very soul, and seemed to know that he was afraid.

Oh, an angry journey surely, and one that carried him to strange places! For remember it was after midnight when he lost the road—a moonless hour and thick woods of Buckinghamshire all about and a little river running through a valley and high banks upon either side, with the trees so many that a man could hardly see his hand before his face. Here upon a bridle-path Dick came to a halt at last, and remembered that the faithful Barry was at his heels. In truth he could hardly see the man, and must be guided by the clinking of the bit and the fall of a clever hoof upon a stony path.

“Tis an odd road, Barry—what said they at the inn?”

“To the right, master, and so you shall come to the river.”

“I hear the trickle of a burn, Barry—and then?”

“Twould be a considerable house and the Quakers' church over against it. God keep us from that—’tis many a devil that ‘thees’ and ‘thous’ an honest man, and then has a fork in him.”

“A plain direction, Barry, upon my soul. Would it be a house with doors and windows? Ay, likely—and so shall we find it. Hark, man, do you hear any sounds?”

“I hear a dog barking, master.”

“No more?”

“Yonder there is a light in the thicket—’twould be Egyptian people, Captain—but, mind ye, I carry the relic of St. Patrick, and be damned to them!”

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"We must ask after my lord, Barry—and yet there is no other road."

"So shall we ask and keep upon this one, master."

They turned from the path and threaded a narrow wood leading to a clearing of the thicket and a camp of the Egyptians. Here were four or five vans drawn up about a reddening fire of brushwood. A dog barked loudly, and horses, wakened from sleep, trotted a little way when Sir Richard passed by. Twenty yards from the open place the horse unearthed a pretty couple of the gypsies lying snug in each other's arms. The girl ran off to the vans, laughing; but the man started up and drew a savage knife from its sheath.

"What do you do here?" he asked them.

"Keep your pistols in your pocket, friend. Come, the night is young and the girl will return. Put me upon the road to Jordans, and I will give you a crown piece for a trinket."

The fellow muttered, savagely—a mangy hound snarled about the nag's heels, and received a fine cut from Barry's whip. Anon a very old woman, so old that she seemed coeval with the bent oaks of her encampment, came from one of the vans, and spoke sharply to her son in the Zingari tongue. Then she turned to Sir Richard.

"Seek you my lord at St. Peter's?"

"How come you with my business?"

"Not with yours, my bonnie man—not with yours. Seek ye him or his young wife— Ho, hol—I read the tale aright. You seek the wife, but you ride too late. Go with the gentleman, Jasper. Say that he comes to dispute with my lord. And mind ye, lad, be not afraid to return alone—I say alone, for this merry gentleman will not pass by again.

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See that ye take him to my lord's door. Point out the window to him—ha, ha!—and he will give thee silver for thy pains—silver for thy pains, this fine gentleman."

It was horrible to hear her cackling there in the moonlight, and for all his courage Dick's heart sank a little. How did such a hag come to the possession of my lord's story? Reflection would have told him that she came by it because her camp was not three miles from the hall as the crow flies, and all the village had the news that a young girl had been carried out from London and would reside awhile at Chalfont Hall. But Sir Dick did not reflect. The hag's threat affrighted him—he was grateful to Barry, who made the sign of the cross in the air and said an *Ave*.

"Drink down thy fears, mother," he cried, tossing her a crown; "there's more than one road to London town. I'll ride in upon another, lest they deride thee."

"Ay," she rejoined, sheltering her bleared eyes with a palsied hand—"a bonnie man. Pity that she did not come to your arms, good master. They'll tell thee so at Chalfont Hall—and ye'll reward my son, ye'll reward him well."

She went as she came, muttering, to her van; but Dick and Barry pressed on, the lad between them, the black path of the wood giving them but little prospect of an easy journey. True, they did not leave the camp wholly unregretted, for the eyes of the awakened gypsy girl followed her lover pathetically and seemed to say: "Why do you linger?" He, however, remained insensible to her appeal. A cunning thought was in his head. Had he not heard his mother speak of my lord's wishes in this matter: No stranger must come through the woods to Chalfont Hall—none upon the road, if it could be forbidden. And would there not be a fine reward for those who helped so great a



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man in this matter? Jasper saw a prospect not only of carrying a piece of silver to the old woman, but of putting something better in his own pocket. He feigned that there was but room for one upon the path, and counselled Barry to ride behind him. Then he drew the great knife from its sheath, and hid it beneath his rags.

XVI

WHY BARRY FIRED



If men were but philosophers they would not take account of any declared peril. Destiny is no lover of a common way. We fear the giant, tilting at him and counting his forces, but the dwarf creeps upon the road and his is the barb which undoes us.

Dick Escombe would have taken a hundred oaths that night that the road to Chalfont was as safe for him as the Mall itself. He did not care a button of his coat for foot-pads, admitted no dangers of the way, nor imagined that any difficulty could be encountered until he stood face to face with my lord, and the great hour of it had come. And yet here is a gypsy lad running by his side beneath the trees, a drawn knife behind his tatters, cunning running riot in his head, and all a Zingari contempt of law and life bidding him venture.

Twice in a hundred paces he made the beginning of a movement which the sudden tripping of the horse or the rider's change of posture alone diverted. And still he clung to the stirrup-leather, still gave clear his directions "to the right, master—a little to the left—yonder there, by the water—now it would be best to ford across, master—oh, but a little way yet—the half of a mile, and then I'll show you

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where my lord's house lies." Dick gave no thought to him at all. You can imagine his loud cry when the report of a pistol rang in his ears, and Jasper, the guide, fell headlong at his feet. This was the truth, none the less. And Barry had shot him, as he never was at pains to deny.

"Good God, Barry—and what now?"

Barry came up at a canter. The dawn had broken over the woods by this time, and a shimmer of gray light rippled through the glades. All was ashen gray as the face of death itself. The lad lay upon his back, the nerves of his mouth twitching, the fingers of his hand so closed about the handle of the knife that a strong man could not have set them free. And upon him Sir Richard looked almost as though he had been his executioner.

"In God's name, Barry, answer me—why did you fire?"

Barry dismounted from his horse, and put the tatters aside.

"'Tis here the reason lies!" he cried, pointing to the knife. "Oh, Sir Richard, but for the mercy of Almighty God, 'twould be upon your face I looked down this minute! Sir, he made to kill you when the horse blundered, and again when you turned about to speak to me. I could have uttered no warning which would not have undone us both—and so I shot him."

"A sorry affair, Barry—we must go to the justices."

"Is Your Honor daft—what have the justices to do with us? The rogue's dead, I'll wager, and there are more to follow him. Ride on for your life, Sir Richard. Ye have not a minute to lose."

He mounted his horse again and bade his master listen. Back in the woods they could hear the thud of hoofs upon the grassy path—there were gypsies following their man,

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and five minutes would bring them to the place. Wisely did this honest fellow speak, and with reason, and Sir Richard would argue with him no more. He touched his horse with the whip, and rode on at a gallop. Let the Zingari pay their own debts, he said. Which resolution hardly had been taken when a fearful cry from the thicket behind him confirmed Barry's wisdom, and both understood the nature of the peril they had escaped.

"Think you that my lord had a hand in this, Barry?"

"Twould be little likely, master—the Egyptians are hard taskmasters."

"And rarely servants. I shall not forget this night, Barry. Heaven send that the day may end as well. We should be near the house, if yon rogue did not lie to us."

"Tis not unlikely, master—and yet I see that which should be a high-road yonder. We shall do better there than in the woods, Sir Richard—and better in London than anywhere else."

"Ye have a heart for the cities, Barry?"

"No, sir; for the men—and the women—who are in the cities."

He sighed deeply while they came out upon the highway, side by side. A mile and a half farther on a lodge at the road-side marked the presence of a house; and this disclosed itself presently: a red brick building of Elizabeth's time, but so much fallen to decay, the grounds so ill kept, and the windows so broken, shuttered, and dirty, that any thought of my lord being here was not to be entertained. None the less, Sir Richard waked the people at the lodge, and a saucy girl poked her head out of a lattice and seemed not unwilling to answer their question.

"Is this Lord Harborne's house, my wench?"

Sir Richard Escombe

"Oh, la, sirl by the way you beat upon my father's door
I thought it would be your own."

"Had I known you were within, my pretty, I had thrown
roses at your window."

"Thorns, sir, thorns, surely—for that is all that a pretty
wench gets hereabouts. Did his lordship expect you, or
shall I run up to say that the King and his gentlemen have
arrived? Here's a shock for a poor old gentleman that is
ill able to bear it. You'll never go to the house unannounced,
sir—at such an hour of the morning."

Sir Dick had forgotten the hour of the morning, but he
remembered it now. It could have been but little more
than five o'clock—an odd hour even to wake his lordship.
Besides, he himself cut no such brave figure that he would
not do well to draw rein awhile. Not an hour had he slept
since young Willoughby told him the news yesterday; he
had tasted but little food, drunk heavily of wine, and had
sleep in his very bones.

"Will you give us a posset if we draw rein awhile?" he
asked the saucy wench.

She was all for that, and told him so.

"La, sirl 'tis but the poorest of china, yet if your nobility
will but venture to put your lips to it—"

"Have done with it, my girl—there's one here who would
put his lips to something softer."

"He'd never kiss your lordship on the forehead—"

"A hit! a hit!—come down and open to us, or we come up,
I swear."

She shut the window with a slam, and keeping them
waiting but a little while, ushered them presently into a tidy
parlor, with samplers upon its walls and an old Bible in a
brown leather cover upon a tidy table. Now she wore a

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pretty dress, and had a ribbon in her hair; but the near advent of the enemy put a curb upon her tongue.

“This,” said Sir Richard, turning over the leaves of the great Book—“this, I’ll venture, is the Book your good father most often uses.”

“Indeed, and it is, sir.”

“On Sunday mornings?”

“Yes, sir—to strop his razors on.”

Even the melancholy Barry must laugh at this; but the girl herself went tripping away, and returned presently with as pretty a breakfast as ever was set before hungry men: Fine white bread, a steaming cup of posset dashed with something from her father’s cupboard, some rashers of fine fat bacon, butter of the purest—even fruit from her little orchard. Upon these the hungry men fell with a gratitude to which their energy was the best tribute. And when they had eaten and heard the girl’s story—as much of it as she would tell them—then they went out to her rose-garden, and there, wrapped only in their cloaks, they slept until ten o’clock—the tired sleep of those who are weary before the day’s work has begun.

XVII

THE SECRET OF THE HOUSE

OW, we might suppose that the keeper's daughter—for such the girl at the lodge proved to be—would have told Sir Richard something of the story of the great house itself; would have admitted that my lord was there, and that he had carried guests to the place. No record of this appears, however, in the published accounts of the business—and, indeed, we may well imagine that Escombe questioned so saucy a creature in vain.

What did astonish him was her nonchalance. Never once did his questions embarrass her. She admitted that her father was abroad in the grounds—that Mr. Mason, the steward, lived at the great house itself; but when my lord was mentioned she merely laughed, and asked how she could be expected to know what great folk were doing. All of which Sir Richard interpreted as the desire to avoid the topic; and when he had come to the conclusion that nothing whatever was to be learned from her sallies, he made up his mind to put surmise to the proof without any further loss of time whatever.

Mind you, this is not to say that sleep had done nothing for him. His thoughts were clearer this morning if his anger remained unabated. The trick they had played

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upon him in London still cried aloud for satisfaction—but Kitty could be remembered even before the jester; and he fell to wondering at that selfishness which hitherto had refused to consider her case.

Why, if report did not lie, was she not the guest at yonder house, imprisoned there at my lord's pleasure, and depending upon her good courage to rebut and resist his persecutions? This was not to be denied; nor might he hope anything from that shred of a man, Anthony Dulcimore, or the old she-cat who would have sold twenty daughters for my lord's smile. Dick preferred to leave these out of the reckoning and to think of Kitty alone, for by her courage alone could he outwit my lord.

Here, then, we have his mood while he walked to and fro beneath the stately elms which girdled the park, and, as he walked, debated what best might be done. Far away across the sward he perceived the ancient house—a wreath of smoke hovering above one of its chimneys, but the lower windows still shuttered and the blinds drawn down. Such a picture of desolation was rare in those days, when men lived upon their estates; and made much of them; but for reasons of his own Lord Harborne had no great love for Chalfont Hall, and had not publicly resided there for nearly fifteen years. So the place went to decay, the gardens to weed; and when Sir Richard observed these things, astonishment asked him why the man had carried Kitty to such a place, or chosen it of his many estates for the pursuit of her.

Were any argument to be offered upon the other side, it appeared to be that of privacy and surprise. For who that knew Harborne would seek him at Chalfont, or believe that he had chosen it for a young girl's wonderland. This

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Sir Richard perceived, and, pluming himself upon such a line of reasoning, he mounted his horse again and rode across the park, determined to gain an entry to the house at any cost.

"They will not open their door to us, Barry," he said (for be sure that faithful fellow rode at his side), "but I am determined to go in, though the walls come down. 'Tis yourself that would approve that same notion."

"Ay," said Barry, "though the house fall, yet will we go in. None the less am I thinking, master, that some would have ridden with better news."

"Do you speak of his lordship?"

"Ay, surely. Does the fox lead where the scent lies well? Here's one that has been hunted many a day and has many a burrow. God send that you dig him out; but I'll believe it when I see his ugly nose above the earth."

Dick thought of it, and could not but agree.

"There may be a trap, but not of the kind you think," he said. "I doubt if the old fox is here, but he will return. As for lackeys, never yet did I see one of the kind who would stand five minutes with the cold steel at his vitals. Ride on and give them notice, Barry—we'll make a beginning of it at once."

Barry obeyed without demur, riding up to the great gate and pulling so heavily at the bell that every bird a hundred yards about went fluttering upward and every dog barked as though this were his particular day. For all that, no one appeared at the door, nor did any blind above appear to be lifted. The house remained as some unawakened citadel of a splendid past. A loom of the smoke above its chimney hovered almost uncannily upon the still air. No

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human being could be perceived; no footstep heard in all its courts.

"My lord sleeps overlong this morning," said Sir Richard, at last. "Stand back, a little way from the door, Barry. They may have something prepared for us, and that not the fatted calf. Stand back and wait. I would not take his lordship unawares."

"For my part," said Barry, "'tis anyways I would take him—front or back or sideways—so long as he were taken; but that's not to the point, master. See you not that this is no ordinary house?"

"What mean you by that, Barry?"

"God knows, sir. I have had a banshee crying in my ears all night, and am no fit companion for your honor. And yet I say 'tis no ordinary house."

"We'll prove it when the time comes. You say well 'tis no ordinary house, and, by the looks of it, inhabited by no ordinary people. Give them another pull, Barry. The birds are gone to roost again."

Barry did as he was commanded, and the men stood together listening for any sound within the place. Certainly, now that they viewed it thus at the very door, it was an uncanny house—the battlements crumbling, the stone so worn, the varnish of the doors all scraped away, the lichen unkempt and straggling. Even the very gravel walks were overgrown with weeds, while as for the stables in the quadrangle, there were not two doors of ten upon their hinges. Clearly the people did not err when they said that my lord had no love for Chalfont Hall. Nor could Sir Richard understand why he had brought the Dulcimores here.

"Do you hear them, Barry?"

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"There's a step upon the stone, sir—and, my God! there's that—"

He reeled back from the door while a fearful cry rang out upon the still air. Whence it proceeded, what voice had uttered it, even a soldier's trained ear could not affirm. Beyond all question, however, it proceeded from one of the upper stories, and echoed a plaint of human distress dreadful beyond all words to hear—that fearful, helpless appeal which may move a man to frenzy and yet find him powerless to respond. Richard Escombe has never denied that he was overcome in that moment by an apprehension such as he had never known in all his life. The awful voice appeared almost to rob him of his reason, and for many minutes together he sat as one dumb and paralyzed.

"What was it, Barry—a woman's voice?" he asked, at last.

"Ay, sir, a woman's voice—if 'twere any voice at all."

"Clap a pistol to yonder door—blow in the lock, Barry!"

"Will that help the lady?"

"I'll have no argument. Blow in the lock! Are we men or children, Barry? Blow in the lock, for God's sake!"

Barry hesitated no longer. He clapped a horse-pistol to the massive door, and the crash of the report rang out through those silent courts with a thunder as of artillery. As for the great door itself, it fell softly, as though it had been a contrivance of the playhouse—for the hinges of it were rusted and rotten, and many a day had passed since man's hand had opened it.

The door fell. And there beyond it lay a splendid hall, furnished as the first Viscount had willed it in the days of William and Mary, but so shabby, neglected, and gone to ruin that there might have been no tenant at Chalfont since

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William's day. Be sure, however, that Richard Escombe had eyes neither for the apartment nor the furniture thereof. Leaping into the hall when the door fell, he began to stare about him wildly, the faithful and ~~timorous~~ Barry at his heels, primed pistols in their hands but fear at their hearts. Whence came the cry? Who had uttered it? For, be it said, it was raised again while they listened—now high above them, as though from one of the upper stories—a haunting, weird cry, unlike anything they had heard in all their lives.

“‘Tis no woman’s voice, master—for God’s sake, hold back!”

“I will not hold back, Barry—would you make a coward of me? Here’s my lord’s secret chamber. Am I to pass it by when the door is open? Sharne on you, Barry—do you not follow me?”

“To hell if need be, master; but we go upon a crack-brained errand—oh, sorrow the day!”

“As Heaven is my witness, you are nothing but a fool. Stay here—or go back to the girl. She has an ample petticoat, Barry.”

“Sir, sir—never did I fear human voice; but this—”

“Is not human? Pah! a hag’s tale. I am going upstairs, Barry.”

He waited for no reply, but began immediately to climb the once glorious staircase, now so decayed and wasted that it cried shame upon all who had thus treated it. Surely, it had been a princely house—this hall of William’s time, now forgotten by one who owned many mansions. And if the rooms above were in a better state than much they had seen below, nevertheless, all had been long closed and denied the sweet, fresh air and the warming sunlight. From suite to suite of these monstrous bedrooms, rarely used since

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Anne had reigned, Sir Richard passed in quest of a voice. The very emptiness of them chilled his heart—he could ask himself if there were anything in the hag's tales, after all.

"See you, Barry," he cried, at last—"as empty as the grave! Do the walls, then, cry out?"

"Ay, master, to a spirit's voice. We shall do no good here—said I not so?"

"Ye make a craven of me, Barry—ye would give me a woman's heart?"

"Not so, sir—but because you have a heart for woman, I would say, return as you came."

"Shall we, then, believe that the eaves have voices?"

"I care for no creed, sir—my tongue would not speak it."

"And yet, Barry—that—that—God! it creeps into the very bones."

He had heard the cry again—*weird, mournful, a very wail as of dead spirits.* And now it seemed to proceed, not from the corridors about them, but from the great hall below, which they had visited not ten minutes ago. Even Dick Escombe was not proof against this. The faith which had carried him so far would carry him no further; and, moreover, some suspicion of the truth came suddenly to inflame and enrage him. Kitty was not in such a house as this; but who, then, whose voice uttered that dreadful lament? His courage could not brave the ordeal. The man beside him had scarce the strength to drag his trembling limbs down the corridor.

"This is a dreadful house, Barry."

"A house of woe, master."

"Think you that my lord is playing a trick upon us?"

Barry looked up instantly.

"I had not thought of it, master."

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"But I am thinking of it now. It would be a grim jest, Barry—God alone knows with what voice he is speaking to us. But if it were a jest?"

"In that case I would ride on that you may the sooner laugh in his face."

"There would be news of this in London to-night—and—could the King have so disgraced me, Barry?"

"Perchance there was another who wished it, sir—and yet—no, not that!—not that!"

He caught his master by the lapel of the coat and held him to the place—for they stood in the great corridor now, in that splendid gallery which runs at the south side of the house and is famous the world over, and here they heard such a horrid burst of fiendish laughter that never a born man had listened to it unmoved. High and shrill and demoniacal, it echoed a vile crescendo and died away at last to that which might have been a shriek of the damned. Upon which, we read, even the faithful Barry gave it up and bolted headlong, leaving his master to any fate the house might have in store for him.

The devil went with him down the stairs, he said afterward—an evil breath scorched the very hair upon his face. Sir Richard, however, did not move. The jest upon the jester! He was thinking of that—the secret! If he could but possess it!

Thrice he paced the great gallery, looking often from the windows, and endeavored to shut his ears to the cry. Some one kept this house for my lord, he argued; but who was he? And whence came this dreadful cry of woe—so real, so terrible, that no human voice had feigned it? This he could not answer; but his courage returned to him, and, searching every nook and cranny with keen eyes, he stooped at last and

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picked some object from one of the little tables which stood in an embrasure of the window. This trifle he thrust into the breast of his coat, and, taking but one look to the gardens below to be sure that the horses were still there, he closed his hand firmly about his sword, and so at last went down.

He had come upon a fool's errand, then—but was it wholly that? High above him that horrid laughter still echoed beneath the rafters—he thought to detect a man's step and the sound of a man's voice, but of this he was not sure. In the hall at last he cast one glance upward, to see a hand at the highest of the balustrades and some black object hurtling down toward him. This was the spirit's answer, then—this heavy missile hurled down at him derisively by the keeper of the house. Escombe knew not what to do, but, firing a pistol at hazard, he quitted the place instantly and left the secret in its keeping.

"The man we seek is elsewhere, Barry," he said, as they rode on, "but we shall find him; and when we have found him he shall answer for yonder house and the infamy it hides."

Barry shook his head.

"Ye have to be in Windsor by nightfall, master," he rejoined; "you will not turn aside again."

Sir Richard made no reply. Circumstance lay too heavy upon him for that. Whither, in God's name, then, had they carried Kitty, and what house harbored my lord?

He knew not what to think. An ironic truth said that Harborne had baffled him, after all, and that London would laugh at the story of this day's work.

XVIII

KITTY IS AT BRIGHTON



Now all this time, you should know, Kitty Dulcimore was at Brightelmstone, in an old house of the village which my Lord Harborne had discovered some two years previously.

Let us be just to this fine villain, and admit that he has deserved something at the memory of his fellow-countrymen, in that he discovered for Englishmen the finest of their southern watering-places, and showed them how many complaints the mild air thereof would benefit.

It is true that it was not until the year 1753 that the writings of the celebrated physician, Dr. Richard Russell, first sent the fashionable world headlong to that salubrious village; but Harborne indisputably turned the physician's attention to the place, and appears to have been one of the very first rightly to estimate its qualities. Determining to build himself a house, he for the time being engaged one that had formerly belonged to a merchant of Shoreham—and here from time to time he adjourned when debauch had wearied him or age had come knocking at his door.

We say that it was but a village at the best—and even that is a flattering description of it. A few crazy cottages nestled beneath beetling cliffs, there was an old wooden

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mole running a little way into the sea, and you might count a score, perhaps, of fishermen's boats hauled up upon the shingle. A tumbling church, the poorest of inns, a crazy posting-house served the convenience of the very few who at that time journeyed down from London to the village. People came in their own carriages, and if they lacked stables sent their horses on to Shoreham or Lewes. Commonly known as Brightelmstone, even in those early days the place had been called Brighton, and is so spoken of in the play, "The Girl I Left Behind Me," first published in the year 1759.

To Brighton, then—for thus we prefer to call it—had Harborne carried the Dulcimores after the affair at Northumberland House, and here in an old house between the cliffs were they installed when next we shall find them.

Some will say that it was not very clever of my lord to take Kitty to such a mean house when he might as easily have opened the door of one of his great establishments to her—the mansion at Dereham, in Norfolk, or that famous castle in Cumberland with which history has made us familiar.

This, however, that shrewd diplomatist and student of women did not choose to do. He had already formed the opinion that such a girl as Kitty Dulcimore was not to be won by magnificence, and did not care a scudo whether he had one or a hundred lackeys at his tail. So he carried her to Brighton—with what intentions we will leave others to judge—and there for nearly a month he lived in the house with the old people, as familiar as though he had been their kinsman, and this was but a merry summer gathering at the paternal house.

And, mark you, 'twas a fellow of some parts and no little cleverness of address. He believed that Time would be his

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friend, and in Time he put his faith. To amuse the high-spirited girl after the fashion beloved by her; to minister to her vanity; to speak great promises; to tell this tale or the other, or what was being done for old Anthony Dulcimore—this was his open employment.

Nor did they live that simple pastoral life you would have imagined, for all their situation. Every morning saw fine fruit and flowers for Kitty's table. There were good horses in the stable for her to drive and ride; the coming and going of gallants from London; engaging picnics to the woods; musicians brought from London—while as for his presents, the day was rare when old Mrs. Dulcimore did not come bursting into Kitty's room to tell her anew of my lord's generosity.

"Such a jewel for your neck, Kitty, my darlint—'tis this very minute the post-chaise has driven in from Mr. Winter's, of Cheapside, in London, Kitty. And, ye see, His Lordship will not give it to you himself. There's fine delicacy, to be sure—and him paying a hundred pounds for it if he paid a penny. Ah, my dear, if your father had been such a man as that—but a plain gold ring for my finger was all the jewels I ever got from him, and dear enough I've paid for it, God knows. Now, just hang this on your pretty neck, and let my lord be seeing you."

Kitty tossed her head, and put the trinket on her dressing-table.

"Does his lordship think that I am a dog, mother, which must be led by a string? How often must I tell him that I do not want his gifts and will not accept them?"

"Ye may tell him as often as ye please, Kitty—he'll never change, be sure. Ah, such a man it is to be loving—and all the fine women in England after him, and carriages and

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horses and lands as many as the King. Oh, I'll carry him no such message but that of your love and devotion and duty. Would ye be called mad by all the world, Kitty? Never will I believe it—never will I have your poor father apologizing because he brought a pretty lunatic into the world. And such envy, my dear—such spiteful looks when we pass by! Oh, I could give thanks to me God for them every time they sneer upon us, and I know it's my Kitty, and she'll be her ladyship just now—she'll name the day—”

“She never will, mother.”

“Then, of all the impudent, worthless hussies; of all the vile, ungrateful, despicable children—was it me that bare ye—was it me that nursed ye in these arms—sure, or was it a Satan's child? Tell me that, miss! Answer me this instant.”

She would cross her arms and, standing in the manner of a fishwife, put these somewhat ambiguous questions. Kitty cared little for her anger, but the scenes, nevertheless, repeated day by day as they were, left her courage at a low ebb and positively frightened her by their possible consequences. She herself never believed for an instant in Harborne's protestations—such is the instinctive judgment of a clever woman—nor deemed him capable of honorable conduct. The more intimate their acquaintance became the more sure was her distrust, so that at last it seemed almost an infamy to have this hatchet-faced, leering monster at her side, his eyes perpetually ogling her, his hands fawning upon her at any excuse, his veiled insinuations in her ears—and with all this the irremovable conviction that he was a rogue in whose path ruin stalked. Of this Kitty was convinced; yet there seemed no way of escape. She had no friend near to whom she might appeal. Her senile

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father would not hear a word against His Lordship. Such a man—such houses, such friends, such a name! The very words, perpetually buzzing in her ears, drove her almost to desperation.

And were there no thoughts of Richard Escombe to color these gloomy reflections or even to banish them? Here, to be sure, we put our finger upon a difficult page and read it but vaguely. No man—nay, no woman—will ever know the whole truth concerning Dick and Kitty as it affected her conduct during that insupportable month of July.

Some there be who say that her pride was monstrous and inexcusable; that she must have read the riddle aright and detected the knavery of the affair at Northumberland House—others declare that she would have forgiven Dick all if he had but written her a single line; that the lies told so often about him in her presence could not but weaken her resolution, even as stone is weakened by the water that drips upon it. Into this we cannot go. She received no letter from Sir Richard, no message, no token of good faith—and be sure the Dulcimores saw that she did not, and Harborne with them, so that every road from London was watched, every possible messenger waylaid, every avenue to correspondence carefully closed.

Thus it befell that Kitty wondered sometimes if pride did not demand a greater sacrifice. How if she married my lord after all; went up to London to show her diamonds; played the great lady at St. James's and at Windsor—showed Dick her true opinion of him, and achieved that supreme revenge which is woman's most potent weapon? Be certain of this, that she was too far-seeing not to have thought of it—and while the temptation assailed her hourly, nothing but the inborn chastity of her race worked for her

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salvation. For Kitty believed that it would be a moral crime to submit to my lord—nor could any argument turn her from that opinion.

Now, it may have been that the hag's persistency, added to old Dulcimore's imbecilities, the daily, almost hourly, importunities of the couple following upon my lord's amazing generosity, would have won Kitty over in the end and compelled her to that submission which alone could purchase her freedom. Upon this no opinion is of any value. She was justly angry with Dick, and believed that she no longer loved him. A vain woman, her vanity had been trampled in the very dust, her name made a byword, her story laughed at by a delighted town. In which state my lord is there to put fuel upon the fire of her resentment, the hag to upbraid her, the old man to ask what he had done that she should forget a daughter's duty.

Sometimes, in grievous despair of it, Kitty would quit the house and rove over the cliffs for hours together. The wold country, the desolate seashore, delighted her at such a time. Here her mother's voice was not heard, nor a palsied lover's protestations. And here, upon the evening of a hot summer's day, here by the water's edge, she was thanking God for the solitude, when who should come creeping up to her but our old friend Honor Marwood—but oh! so shabby in her dress, so downcast and generally miserable, that the girl's heart went out to her in a minute, though she had not the least idea who she might be.

“Dear lady,” says Honor, “you do not know me; but if I might speak a word to you—” *

She looked about her furtively, and as she looked, seeming to fear observation, Kitty's heart beat fast—for here at last, she said, would be the messenger from Windsor,

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How long had her weary eyes looked for him in vain! What bitter days and nights of disappointment she had suffered! Dare she hope that this was the end of it all—this the word her pride had so long awaited?

“Oh yes, yes,” cried she; “and why should you not speak to me? Are you afraid, madam?”

Honor’s face flushed—she still appeared very uncomfortable, and looked appealingly at Kitty, as though to say: “This is a very public place; let us draw a little closer to the cliffs.”

“I’ve walked from London, miss, and that’s a good step, surely—for I’m not the girl that I was when I played at the King’s Theatre, and all the town remembered the name of Honor Marwood.”

“Honor Marwood!—you are Honor Marwood?”

“No other, mistress—and one who would willingly do you a service.”

Imagine how Kitty looked at her. Had not this name been written large in the story of her own life—had she not shed bitter tears because of it—imagined vain things, and built for her own undoing a very Castle Doubting? And here the woman was at Brighton—the woman about whom she had heard so many unpardonable stories, and for whose good name Dick had thrashed His Lordship on the Mall. Indeed, Kitty looked the lady up and down with that fine scorn the gentlest of souls can command sometimes.

“What service do you speak of—oh, surely, I desire nothing of the kind, and why do you come here, madam?”

“To bring you happiness, lady—to tell you that which you should know for your own sake, and that of the kindest gentleman in England this night. Oh, believe me, I am here at no little risk to myself. We players, lady, have

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too few friends that we can slight the patronage of any one of them—and much I owe to His Lordship, and am not afraid to say so before the world. But, sure, I did Sir Richard Escombe a great wrong, and I have come to you to tell you of it. Cannot we walk a little where no other eyes may see? Miss Dulcimore, trust me, I beg of you; look into my face—God knows it's not the pretty face that once it was—and tell me if such a woman as I would come so far to lie to you."

She laid a thin hand upon Kitty's long sleeve, and there were tears in her eyes—as much, it may be, because she thought of the memories of her own girlhood as of the disappointment of these latter weeks. For my lord patronized Honor Marwood no more. The affair at Northumberland House, ill-planned and disastrous in its outcome, had left him sore enraged against all who had taken part in it. Honor had nothing to gain from him—and yet, hoping desperately as women will, she still thought to retrieve her broken fortunes by this last supreme endeavor. Let Kitty Dulcimore become Dick Escombe's wife—and my lord must be another man, surely. Kitty, upon her part, her heart touched by a woman's tears, and her sympathies won by this clever reference to Dick, could not curb her curiosity to hear more. She walked toward the high cliff, as Honor wished, and there, in a little bay of the shingle, she heard her story.

"Lady, Sir Richard Escombe is at Windsor—but his heart is broken. Few see him—he does that which is his duty, but afterward goes God knows where. It was my tongue which persuaded him to ride to London to see you—but I was my lord's dupe, and, lady, on my hopes of salvation, I meant him no wrong. What happened to him was

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my lord's doing—I knew nothing of it until three days after, when they charged me with it."

"They charged you!" cried Kitty. "Do you see my lord often, then?"

Honor cast down her eyes.

"We poor people must make all the great friends we can. I have left the theatre, lady, but the theatre must keep me. And, you see, such a great man as Lord Harborne is—he that used to be patron when the benefits were bespoke—it's much to me to have his good-will, and yet I cannot see a wrong done and hold my peace; and so I went to Windsor, lady—I went that my lord should not marry you and his favor be withdrawn. Oh, I was never the one to bear with deception or to support it for long; but, Miss Dulcimore, if the heart of one woman may speak to another, then I do tell you truly that Sir Richard has no other hope in this world but your sweet love for him, and that they wrong him who tell you otherwise. This is what brought me here—though I shall not keep it from you that your happiness, lady, would also be mine; for, sure, my lord would not be long angry with me, nor withhold his favor from me and my friends of the theatre, if you were Lady Escombe. This I say to your face, and, God knows, I have said it often enough behind your back. You do wrong to remain at Brighton—you do wrong for Sir Richard's sake. Remember my words, and judge me when the proper time comes. It is dangerous for me to be here, and I'll keep you no longer than is necessary to say what I have come so far to say. But oh, mistress, forget not that Sir Richard loves you, and there is no more honorable gentleman in all the kingdom of England to-night."

Kitty sighed deeply—the strange nature of the woman's

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mission, her evident sincerity, and her amazing candor could not fail to leave their impression. There was so much to ask her, so much to be learned—and we shall observe a certain innocence in the manner of it all, and yet a great anger growing silently against my lord for all that Kitty imagined and understood of his treatment of this poor creature.

"You have been to Windsor? When was that, madam?" she asked Honor, who answered, readily enough:

"I was there three days ago—the Dean's lady is my friend since I left the playhouse. I went to pay my respects to her, lady."

"And you saw Sir Richard Escombe?"

"I saw him, lady—twice at the parades and once riding abroad in the park. That would be toward the club at Medmenham, where all the gentlemen go. They tell me that he was looking for my lord. I pray to God, Mistress Dulcimore, that these gentlemen may never meet until a woman's word has first been spoken. You will join me in that. You would wish to keep them apart, lady?"

"Oh, what voice have I in it?" asked Kitty, pettishly.

"You could have every voice," said Honor, quickly, "if you would but send word to Sir Richard, lady."

"When he has written nothing to me? Oh, do you not see that if he were their dupe in London his duty should have dictated this letter for which I wait?"

"But, lady—are ye so sure 'twas never written? I have friends in the castle, and many things are known to me which are withheld from others. How if he has written the letter and it has miscarried?"

"They would never dare to treat me so."

"Not the first so treated by many a one, lady. You are in the hands of a very clever man, and will need all your

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wits to get out of them. Do not forget it, whatever happens here. This I say of my own knowledge—none comes in or out of Brighton who is not known to my lord, unless he first tells his business. I rode in the wagon, lady, and passed for the sister of a sea-captain at Shoreham—but Lord Harborne will know of my coming to-morrow as sure as there's a sun to set in yonder heavens. So I say to you, ask them who stopped Sir Richard's messenger, and then decide. And if you would write to him yourself, send the letter by one you can trust to the Bell Inn at Shoreham before nine o'clock to-morrow, and I myself will carry it to Windsor. Let it be to-night, for to-morrow must find me on the road again."

Kitty knew not what to say to this. Clever as she was, she had but half perceptions of the truth—now asking herself if a trick were being played upon her, then debating the uglier possibility that this woman had come to Brighton at my lord's request, and that all else she heard was a fairy tale. Nor may we judge her because of her difficulties. Honor Marwood was just one of those fitful, self-seeking, irresponsible personages whose acts are so perplexing, even to those who know them best. Half the story she told was true, the half of it false. She had come to Brighton because my lord no longer remembered her; but she had not walked a mile of the way. Perhaps had Kitty written to Dick she would have carried the letter to Harborne first. We cannot say. It may be that she herself did not know—and yet she cut as pretty and pitiful a figure of distress as any tender-hearted creature might have desired to see.

"Oh," says Kitty, at last, "I know not what to do—but I am very grateful to you, madam. If I should come to an opinion before the morning you shall certainly hear from

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me. Meanwhile—ah, don't think ill of me!—will you deny me the happiness of assisting you upon your journey? You cannot refuse me, madam, for I, also, am but a sister in misfortune."

Be sure that Honor's eyes brightened at this and at the sight of the dainty leather purse held temptingly in the fair white hand. Greed of money was inseparable from her life. And now, when money was mentioned, she cast a quick glance at the cliff above, then another up and down the shingly beach, and one at last to the sea, where a fisherman's boat drew in lazily toward the land, and having assured herself that she was unobserved, she protested against that which she most desired with a whine peculiar to her arts.

"Dear lady, you bring shame upon me; how shall I thank you—but, there, I know my heart will break—and you'll write to Sir Richard this night, and send it to the Bell Inn at Shoreham, for I must be away by daybreak, and, lady, 'twould be more than my life is worth for His Lordship to know. So let your messenger be a trusted one, and—there, I can't say more, for my words will choke me, and God bless you, mistress, and God bless Sir Richard, who is the truest gentleman in England this night."

So she went shuffling off, just as the sun climbed to the cliff, and trudged through the village upon her way to Shoreham. At the best a woman of some true feeling, at the worst to be pitied in her misfortunes and readily forgiven in those far from clever intrigues to which necessity and man's baser nature had driven her.

Such was the Honor Marwood whom we meet for the second time; that self-appointed ambassadress whose once pretty face had wrought so great a mischief in the world.



XIX

IN WHICH MY LORD LOSES PATIENCE



T was growing dusk when Kitty returned to the house. She found her mother in a rare tantrum because of the company that had arrived.

"As many of the quality, Kitty, me darlint, as there are pease in a shell. How we shall satisfy their cravings, the Lord above me only knows. 'Tis this very morning I was saying to your poor father that he'd have to go into the sea like the whale in the Scriptures—and sure these great folks are wonders at the eating. But there—be off and dress yourself at once—'tis His Lordship himself that was asking for you not five minutes gone by the clock. 'I am alone and I perish,' says he—ay, there's the juice of poesy, there's the very flower of a man. Be off and dress yourself, and say that sorry you were to have kept him waiting."

"But I'm not sorry, mother, and I sha'n't say it—and if His Lordship would only perish immediately, how much obliged to him would I be!"

She did not wait for her mother's angry retort, but ran up to her bedroom whence she could espy the fine gentlemen riding in from their sport among the hares and rabbits upon the Downs—a gallant company enough, with as many fine

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clothes as would have served the King's Theatre. For was not the fat fop Mr. Cunningham come down from London, and had he not ridden in with the stately Churchill and the foolish Ailsa and that very matter-of-fact person the Marquis of Repton, whom last we saw at Sherbourn? These had spent a boisterous day upon the heights above the sea, and were now returned to Brighton with the appetites of giants—to say nothing of that craving for strong liquors which even His Lordship's cellars would be hard put to it to satisfy.

"Upon my life and soul, I suffer the tortures of Tantalus!" cries Cunningham. To whom the Marquis answered:

"Give him a bunch of grapes, somebody. Such a cursed, unclassical countenance would scare the gods off Olympus."

"For my part," said Churchill to Mrs. Dulcimore, "I would not ride another mile though Aphrodite herself were rising from the deep."

"You hear, Mrs. Dulcimore," says Ailsa, "your image brings him to a halt. Oh, a devilish fine day we've had of it, I do assure you. And here we are crying for love and honey like children from the playing fields. You will not say that the cooks are to keep us waiting."

"The half of an hour, my lord, and no more. 'Tis such appetites as ye have! This very morning says I to Mr. Dulcimore: 'God help us all if His Lordship brings them back to supper.' And here ye are like flies about the honey."

Her candor found them merry enough, and anon Dulcimore himself emerged from the house and added to the hilarity.

"Gentlemen," he began, "such apologies as I have to make are best made at the beginning—"

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At which a shout of laughter went up, and was still to be heard when Lord Ailsa asked for Kitty.

“We languish, Dulcimore, we positively evaporate. Has His Lordship carried her to France, then? Sly dog—but you’ll apologize for that, I’ll wager. Come, man, you are not telling us that the honey-moon is over. What! bedded already and not a glass lifted! Out upon you for a rogue—I never saw a shaft go home so cleanly.”

Old Dulcimore said “Hush, hush,” and reminded them that his good lady had but just gone into the parlor and that my lord himself was riding in from the Downs.

“I have bidden them make a cup of hock for your refreshment,” said he. “It may serve until the supper be ready. Not a word of all this before His Lordship, gentlemen. A man of rare delicacy, my lords. My daughter is about to descend, and will speak for herself. I beseech you to be prudent.”

They heard him impatiently, and soon a regular hubbub arose in the house: men going in and out at their pleasure, some to the stables, some to the inn—none paying overmuch respect to the Dulcimores, but all treating the place as though it had been an ale-house. Which conduct, we may note, did not go unperceived by Kitty, who stood at the bedroom window above; and she began to ask herself if men would dare so to behave unless my lord encouraged them and was aware of their impertinence. To be plain, the whole adventure opened her eyes in an amazing manner, and so hot was her anger against the company that she sent down word to my lord begging to be excused and feigning an indisposition. This, unhappily, the old dame would not accept, and to cries of “Fetch her out!” “No, no, we know better!” they compelled her at last to ac-

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quiesce, and to assist at a repast which they declared must be but vinegar without her.

"She fears your wit, Cunningham," says the Marquis.

"Cringing at a shadow," suggested Ailsa.

"Being utterly overcome and blinded by his magnificence," says Churchill.

Cunningham bore it all good-temperedly.

"It is evident that my lord sups with a long spoon," said he, at which Mr. Dulcimore again said "Hush," and the old lady was afflicted by a hardness of hearing that she found incurable. From which point the mischief became progressive, and Kitty must sit there and listen while great flagons of wine were set before the gallant huntsmen and the talk waxed more impudent from minute to minute. Long before supper was done twenty insults had been spoken which, had an honest man been present, would have drawn at least one blade from its scabbard.

It would be idle to disguise the meaning of this orgy, and just as idle to account for Harborne's design in the matter. Some who knew him best declare that patience was not among his many qualities—that he had become impatient of this present employment and was determined to end it, let the consequences be what they might.

Others again aver that his intention to marry Kitty had been honest, while his anger against Richard Escombe blinded him to other consequences, but that this ardor of conventionality cooled altogether at Brighton, and threw him back upon more ancient and more evil arts.

A coward where women were concerned, he permitted these rogues and rakes to utter the sentiments which he himself favored and to be in some way his mouthpiece.

However it might have been, the question concerns us

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little, save to show the absurdities which are attributed to a woman's innocence and to emphasize that instinct of girlhood which is a woman's surest protection. And so we shall say that Kitty was not for a moment deceived; that she understood what a well-meaning mother failed to understand, and that, her eyes being opened and her heart afame, she quitted the room at last, so ashamed, so desperate, so awakened to her danger, that she would have sacrificed even life itself to have obtained her liberty.

Now, this was at the height of the debauch, and to be sure a very salvo of wit attended her departure.

"Oh, come," says Ailsa, "here's Venus picking her way among the oyster-shells. Has my lord no apple in his basket, then?"

"She's gone for the lamp," says Cunningham—"Psyche and the holy oil. Zounds, Harborne, 'tis a devilish ugly god she will awake, and too square in the shoulders to get out of the window. Vanish, man, vanish in an ethereal vapor, but, for God's sake, pass the bottle before you go."

"Hush!" cried Churchill, imitating the gentlemen at the theatre; and then, in a deeper voice: "The time will come—"

Even the matter-of-fact Repton could join in at a moment like this.

"St. George calls a chair," says he. "A new reading, Harborne. The women kill the dragons nowadays. They've no use for us."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" cries old Mrs. Dulcimore, "'tis but a whiff of the vapors and will pass presently. I'll go to Kitty myself while you are after the wine—though better you'd be without it, the Lord knows, and some of us money in pocket. Let me Anthony touch another drop

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and I'll know what to say to him—will I not, Anthony, me darlint?"

Anthony Dulcimore expressed the opinion that her vocabulary certainly would not fail her, and off she went in high dudgeon. At first she thought that Kitty would have run up-stairs to her bedroom, but there she was mistaken; nor could the truant be discovered in any room in the house. In no way apprehensive, and wholly foolish in her confidence, this now fond mother determined that her peevish child would be in the garden, whence she would return anon, and so she herself took up her accustomed place in the high-backed chair upon the little terrace overlooking the sea, and there in solemn state she awaited my lord's appearance. Well-meaning soul, with what terrible weapons did she not unwittingly play! how far from the realization of all her ambitions she stood! how many bitter tears must be shed because a rogue had entered her house and she had received him with open arms!

Now, Kitty had gone down to the garden and from the garden to the sea-shore. There, in the moonlight, she walked a full hour, so distressed, so full of the gravest apprehensions, that surely her pride did penance in that hour for all the sins she had committed since pride could sin at all.

For, you see, the whole meaning of it had come to Kitty in a moment, just as though a flash from heaven above showed her a pit at her feet and she had drawn back shivering. Many a time had she doubted Lord Harborne's sincerity, many a time scoffed at the notion of marriage with him, and said that he was but making game of her simple parents. For all that, the new turn which things had taken came to her as a revelation of infamy black beyond all belief.

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"Oh," she would cry, "if I had but a friend, but one in all the country—a house to harbor me, an honest man at my side!" And in the same breath she would remember her treatment of Dick and try to say that he had deserved it, and break down wholly in the task and shed bitter tears because of all that had befallen them. Dick had treated her badly enough—it was beyond bearing to recollect the affair at Sherbourn, and what she had suffered because of it—nevertheless, had Sir Richard come to her to-night, just opened his arms to her, and said "Kitty," ah, how she would have run to him, what tears of joy have shed, what words sobbed out upon his heart—if Dick had come to her!

She was a brave girl enough—this record must prove as much—and we shall pass by a scene of weakness as one that is rare in her story. Flight had carried her a good way from Brighton upon the cliff road to Shoreham, and delighting in the clear, cool air that blew up from the sea, the picturesque scene of moonlight and the black shapes of the fishermen's boats, she recovered her spirit presently, and discovered that weakness was the prelude to a resolution such as she had never known in all her life before.

Now she could begin to ask if she might ever return to my lord's house at all, or, if she did not return, what alternative lay before her. Young as she was, she perceived that any public scandal would be precious to my lord, and that some account of it, once published abroad, would ruin her irretrievably. Or, more than this, we may imagine that she cringed from the thought that this night's story might come to Sir Richard's ears, and, driven by that chiefly, but also by a very real fear of the company she had left, she bethought her suddenly of her kinswoman, her

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aunt Elizabeth, who had a house at Marlow, and to whom a visit already had been proposed. Here was a saving idea which rewarded her courage. Kitty hesitated no longer. To Marlow she said that she would go—she knew not how or when, but at the earliest possible moment—in which happy resolution she perceived, for the first time, how far she had walked and how late the hour must be.

Why, yonder stood Shoreham itself! She could count the lights upon the ships and the pier, discern the windows of the houses, and even hear a boatman hailing a vessel in the river. No prettier picture could be imagined than that of the moonlit sea and the anchored vessels, and the black houses and the squat church spire, whose bells were just chiming the hour; but Kitty would have liked it better if the strokes of the clapper had been fewer, for the chime said ten o'clock as plainly as a bell ever spoke at all, and she knew that two good hours had passed since she quitted the house and went flying like a thorough-bred over the cliffs.

Two hours in that passion of anger against those who had affronted her—two hours lamenting her unbefriended condition and her loneliness! Was it not something to set her heart trembling and to bring upon her some true understanding as to her condition and its limitations?

Kitty might have admitted it but for one circumstance, and that was the appearance at the toll-gate of Shoreham of my Lord Harborne himself, mounted upon the very black horse he had ridden down from London, while by his side walked Honor Marwood, as deep in talk with him as any gossip that ever mumbled mischief across a teacup. At which discovery Kitty stood quite still, as though some one had struck her a blow. Oh, be sure, she understood the meaning of it perfectly! Nothing was hidden from her;

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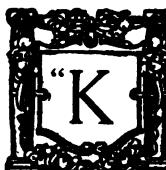
the child comprehended that which the woman might have passed by.

"She came to me with a lie, then," was her unspoken thought; "it was all false—all—all. Dick sent me no message; he has never written a line. This woman is my lord's messenger; they are laughing at it now. Oh, the simple maid who believed their story!—and the slut's tears—oh, the shame of it!—and she an actress; and I thought I—no, no, I was not deceived; I never believed—never, never—that Dick had written—that he remembered—no, I won't believe it—I won't—I won't."

Rage, shame, and bitter resolution—these crowded together upon her as she turned swiftly and ran back toward Brighton at even a better pace than she had come. Her determination to escape at any cost, to flee the country, to go she cared not whither, if the journey but carried her beyond the confines of the shame—this was unaltered; but she was at as great a loss as ever how this might be carried out when she heard a horse cantering behind her, and, turning, she beheld my lord and understood his purpose.

XX

IN WHICH WE HEAR OF A WHIP

 KITTY, Kitty! by all that's amazing, it's little Kitty!"

She had run herself to a stand-still, and breathed with such difficulty that she could no more have answered my lord than have flown across the moonlit sea. There she stood, her hand pressed to her heart, her hair flying to the wind, her dress blown all about her shapely figure, and there from the saddle Harborne watched her with a grin upon his hatchet face that told of pleasant satisfaction.

"Of all the lucky men in Sussex!" he went on—for, remember, the bottles had been many, and Frederick Lord Harborne was not the man to pass them by—"of all the lucky men in Sussex! Now, here's a pretty thing. That I should find Kitty Dulcimore upon the road to Shoreham just when my old horse was complaining of the darkness, and devil a lantern for half a mile about. Zounds! I vow a silver altar to the gods; but, Kitty, look at me; tell me that you knew of it, say that it is not all an accident; Kitty, are you angry with me for finding you, then?"

She had recovered herself by this time, and all her wits were at work. An alarm such as she had never known in any association with men before was inspired by the presence

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of this perfumed and larded soldier who, with all his personal defects, had eyes which could look a woman through and through, to say nothing of the fine figure and white hands of the born aristocrat. His voice purred when he spoke to her, his fingers touched her own with a silky touch, the jewels at his throat and wrists sparkled in the darkness; it was impossible to forget that his ancestors had practised for a thousand years those very arts in which he excelled and to which so many submitted.

"My dear lord," says Kitty, "if I were a horse who had strayed from a meadow, perhaps I'd be obliged to you, but being only a woman—"

"Are ungrateful as all your kind. Come, be honest with me; something was said to-night which offended you?"

"Oh, la! then I'd be a particular person, indeed, to criticise your noble friends who make an ale-house of your parlor and a fool of its master when the ale is drunk."

"Kitty, Kitty"—for the reference to himself had provoked some irritation—"what would you have me think of you, Kitty?"

"That I am best left out of your thoughts and others named therein. There are many more willing for a courant in the moonlight, Lord Harborne; I'm a simple little body, and when great folk touch me I turn cold."

"That I'll believe when it's put to the proof. Mind not the rogues at all; they are like children from a school when they come to the tea."

"And, like children, would be better for the birch. Will you be telling them that in the morning, my lord?"

"Zounds! what a vixen—she'd flog the Guards! You must tell them that yourself, Kitty—or, better, bid them be gone, if you will. What! would you be alone with me?"

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"If you were absent, yes, sir, I would be alone with you."

"Come, not so fast—we shall be in Brighton before I have well begun. Here's a lover's seat ready built for the asking—come, Kitty—there would be an irony in that—shall we sit upon the lover's seat?"

"I have too much regard for your reputation, my lord. Is it for me to tell what you have told me for the last time upon four occasions already? Oh, here's a poet with but one string to his bow. I'd be better at home, my lord."

"Having but one pillow for a pretty head. What says a good right arm to that?"

"Oh, la! it's pillow'd many, I'll be bound. Will you please let me go, my lord?"

"What! was I holding your hand? A thousand apologies; but, you see, my beautiful jewel, there are some hands so small that a man does not know whether he holds them or no. Let's sit here and cry a truce. I've much to say that has been left unsaid. Eh, gad! what could be finer—a parley in the moonlight, and so home when the cock crows? You'll not refuse me that, Kitty?"

"Indeed, and I shall, my lord, as you very well know."

"In which case we ride in together and cry a view-halloa. Surely, our friend Churchill will have something to say to that—and Cunningham—they'd cry the news to half the town to-morrow. Oh, I should sit awhile, Kitty—I should hear what the ambassador has to say."

She comprehended his meaning instantly. Should she refuse him an audience he would proclaim to all the town that she had gone to Shoreham with him at such an hour. This, however, did not daunt her; and it was not fear of him but curiosity which kept her to the place.

"Am I so much to the town, then, that it would make news

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of me? You are not very clever, Lord Harborne—not a very clever man for all the world says of you. Let's begin the parley with that—”

“Kitty—Kitty—what a golden head the moonlight makes of it! I positively am beside myself—good God! why do you plague me in this way?—don't I love you well enough?”

“Too well, my lord—at present. By-and-by you would love me not at all. Oh, what a beautiful affection it is, extending to my dear parents! Are you not ashamed, Lord Harborne, to treat simple people so?”

He opened his eyes wide at this.

“A dare-devil little philosopher, upon my word! Oh, I've no stomach for that—come closer to me, Kitty, a little closer—”

But Kitty's line of argument was not to be interrupted.

“Befooling them before your friends,” she went on—“bribing them so that even the servants mock their presence in the house. Do you think that I am to be won that way, my lord?”

“My dear lady, I don't care which way it is, so long as you are won. Why not listen patiently. I said in London I would make you my wife. You've never answered me that, Kitty?”

“Oh, my dear lord—what a memory!”

“And here at Brighton you've treated me no better than a dog—a mere mongrel who has forgotten how to bark. I'll not stand that, Kitty—by the stars, I won't!”

He laughed at his own assumption of ferocity, and, in truth, we find both in his manner of speaking and his insolence toward her something very foreign to the habitual dignity and shrewdness of this capable man. In a word, my Lord Harborne had been just the half of an hour too

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long over the bottle, and this clown's mood was the result. Kitty quite understood as much, and would have readily escaped him; but every time she tried to rise his arm closed about her, and, fearing to provoke him to something more impudent, she still continued to parley.

"Dogs have no souls—they must suffer sometimes," she said. "Would you go home now if I said the word?"

"Not a step of the way. Your eyes hold me like a lode-star. Is that my fault? Not a bit of it—blame the moonlight and your pretty face. By all there is in life, Kitty, I shall make you love me—d'ye understand that?—make you love me. Is it nothing that I have more to offer than any man you've met or ever will meet. Kitty, I'll make you the best woman among them all—upon my sacred word of honor, I'll give you anything in the world; but you shall love me."

"'Shall' is the future, Lord Harborne—I can't answer for that. Oh, la! now I'm sure the wind begins to blow cold, and home I go whether you will or no. Would you have me ill with a fever, my lord?"

"I would have you for my little wife. Kitty, I won't part with you—gad! I couldn't—not yet—not yet."

"But you must—I insist—oh no, no, my lord, you must not touch me—"

He tried to catch her in his embrace, and for an instant succeeded, defying her strength and pressing her close to him. His eyes burned while they looked down into her own; his lips were almost at hers when with a quick movement she slipped from his arms and, all her blood fired at the insult, she snatched the riding-whip from his arm and cut him over the face with it. My lord bore the scar of that to his dying day. It never ceased to remind him

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of an hour of madness for which he was to pay a heavy price.

"Some dogs must be whipped!" she cried, savagely; and then, throwing the weapon from her hand, she ran as though furies of shame were upon her heels—she cared not whither, if she might but escape him. Nothing was remembered now but the insult he had put upon her: Honor Marwood's visit, the false story of Dick's contrition, her own determination to leave Brighton and to seek out her kinswoman at Marlow—her mind remained a blank as to these. The insult—how the memory of it seemed to scorch her very soul!

To Kitty it appeared almost as though she had been in a manner guilty and must accuse herself for what had happened. Why had she stayed to listen to him? Why had she permitted him even to touch her hands? And would anything redeem the facts of this night? Kitty shuddered again when she recalled them. She had forgotten the road, the hour, the meaning of her absence—she wished to hide herself from all the world. And this was her condition when, quite unaware of the fact, she arrived upon the outskirts of the village of Brighton—walked, indeed, to my lord's very door; and there discovered in an instant that her lips were unlocked, the flood-gates of her grief opened, and that she could tell all her story to one who would listen with a boy's ear and a man's sympathy.

We shall say in a word that he was no other than our old friend Ensign Willoughby, who had arrived at the house an hour ago, carrying an urgent message from the Prince to Lord Churchill, and thus, as we shall believe, was providentially sent to Kitty's aid in the hour of her greatest need.



XXI

THE ELOPEMENT

OW, there had been a rare carouse in the house, and while Lord Harborne had ridden off to Shoreham to confab with Honor Marwood (as we have seen) my Lords Churchill and Ailsa had cried best to the bottle, and frankly permitted themselves to be carried to their beds. As for the fat fop Cunningham, he had gone out also to walk awhile by the sea; but sleep overtaking him at the second turn, he lay full length upon the shingle, where he would repose until to-morrow's sun came to awaken him. Of the others, old Mrs. Dulcimore was the only one who had her wits about her; and she, we gladly confess, was scared out of her wits by Kitty's absence.

At first she thought it was but a fit of the vapors, that it would pass immediately and send Kitty back to her, if not repentant, at least acquiescent. When this did not happen, when hour succeeded hour, and the servants were sent this way and that in quest of the missing girl, then in truth a mother's instinct returned; and from anger the poor old soul passed to laments, and from laments to downright honest tears shed abundantly and with meaning. Pathetically and with her hands upraised, she asked old Dulcimore if she had ever desired aught in all this world but

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Kitty's happiness; if she had planned, slaved, and schemed to any other purpose; if he could name the day when it had been otherwise.

"And such a fool of a man for her father! Oh, God save and help me! Is it him I must put up with for the daughter that is gone? Is this the one who will sit there like a hulk when my darlint Kitty may be under the cold water? Mr. Dulcimore—Mr. Dulcimore, I do believe you're the most outrageous man in England this night, and the wickedest. Be up and doing, sir—isn't she your own daughter, flesh of your flesh and bone of your bone? And I tell ye she's left me—she's fled the house—my Kitty—my darlint—oh, sorrow the day—"

Here would follow a violent burst of sobbing, varied upon occasion by a useful fit of hysterics. Never did old Anthony do so much apologizing in all his days. And he had a hundred stories ready. Kitty was but just gone across the road to see old Miss Pennyfeather, and was staying there to plague them. Any minute might bring her back to the house. She would be down by the sea laughing at what she had done.

"I am grieved, profoundly grieved, my love—indeed, I do not know how to apologize for her waywardness. She's young and we are two old folks—do not let us forget that. And, my dear Clara—now come—now, don't you think that we, perhaps, have been a little premature, a little over-wishful in this matter. If I could bring you to see so much—"

"I do believe," says the old lady, wringing her hands anew, "that I have married a baboon from the Indies. Oh, get out of me sight, man—take yerself away—'tis no more sense ye have in your head than the old cow in the

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stable! Be off and find the girl—and don't you dare to come back to me unless she comes with you."

Of course he went, gladly and with new apologies, and what must happen directly he had gone but that the boy Willoughby arrives, hot from London in quest of Lord Churchill. A fine house of sorrows for such a lad to come to and a sorry tale for him to hear: my lord up-stairs unable to hiccough another word, Lord Harborne Heaven knew where, Kitty taken herself off, Mr. Cunningham vanished as surely as the Cock Lane ghost! All of which Mrs. Dulcimore recited at length and with tears—and while she recited it a great hope came to Master Willoughby.

How, he asked himself, if Kitty, fleeing from circumstances he could well understand—how if she had taken the road to London, the very road which he himself must take, since his orders were imperative to deliver the papers to Lord Churchill and to return to London immediately? He believed it to be possible. None understood better than he the character of the wayward but clever girl with whom these people were dealing. Ensign Willoughby thought it by no means improbable; but of that he did not whisper a syllable to old Mrs. Dulcimore.

"I don't believe a word of it, Mrs. Dulcimore," he said, laughing. "Kitty has just gone away in a huff, and, for all you know, is back in the house again by this time. She's too clever to give you cause for any real anxiety. Take my advice and send some one up to her bedroom—as like as not you'll find her there all the time."

"The very thing I said to me Anthony—not five minutes ago. She'll be up-stairs all the time, I said; and what must the ijot be doing but setting off for Shoreham after

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her. Oh, sorrow the day that I was married to an elephant, sorry the—but wait till he comes home and I'll know his reasons—ay, Mr. Willoughby, and with justice!"

Willoughby laughed in his sleeve at this, and, having drunk a glass of wine and eaten a mouthful of food, he returned to the chaise in which he had travelled down from London—and there, with his very foot upon the step, he came face to face with Kitty, as we have told, and was instantly put in possession of her story.

"Cousin Willoughby—oh, can it be Cousin Willoughby?"

"Now, Mistress Kitty, could it be any other? What! you are in trouble—crying—oh, Kitty, Kitty—"

"I met my lord upon the cliff, and he insulted me—I cannot return to his house, Cousin Willoughby—neither my father nor mother understands—they are simple people and know no better. Cousin—I must go away—I must leave this place—will you take me, cousin?"

"But, Kitty, think, what will they—"

"I care not though all the country cries upon me. Is it not enough that I have been in this man's house for weeks together? Cousin Willoughby, I am going to my kinswoman at Marlow. If you will not help me to get there, I will walk the whole way—and I have not a shilling in my pocket nor a cloak for my neck. Now, cousin—"

He stared at her amazed. His pulse beat furiously, his tongue cleaved to the roof of his mouth because of the excitement of his thoughts.

"Kitty," he stammered—"you know there is nothing I would not do—and if your mind is really set upon it—"

"Oh, cousin, cousin," cries Kitty, "if I were your sister, would you leave me here for men to scorn me or would you take me to a house of safety?"

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"God knows, I would give my life for you," says the lad—and immediately opening the door he bade her enter the chaise.

Such, then, was the beginning of that pretty flight—an escapade of which the town would make much in the days to come, as we shall presently discover. And yet, as we know, it was never even a boy-and-girl affair; never so much as a hoyden comedy playing among the wheat sheaves innocently or set up for an example in the pastorals beloved of the King's Theatre.

Kitty fled from Brighton because she believed it were an infamy to stay longer there—the young soldier accompanied her because she asked him to, and for no other reason under God's sky.

It is true that Master Willoughby's heart beat quick, that the blood throbbed in his veins, and that every impulse of his young manhood was quickened when he found himself side by side with Kitty in the chaise; but this was a natural sequence enough.

How he loved the child! How often in his dreams had he pictured her as the new day discovered her—eyes half closed, upon a white pillow, the golden threads of her pretty hair tousled upon a snow-white forehead, her breath faint as one who sleeps a child's sleep, the little hands clasped upon her lap—Kitty become the nomad, Kitty fleeing from riches to the cot, and by her side a man who named her for his divinity! None the less, young Willoughby would sooner have cut off his strong right hand than have betrayed a word of the truth at such an hour. Indeed, we find that he labored for her comfort in a way that no man of the world could have bettered: rousing the inns at her coming, urging the post-boys to despatch, asking her at

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every turn how she did, and expressing his love by no other overt act than that of the homage his eyes could not conceal. And thus, at last, he brought her to St. James's; and there he left her at a hostelry he knew until leave could be obtained and he might conduct her to Marlow to her kinswoman's house.

Of this second stage of the journey we shall have but little to say. It had been a happier day for Ensign Willoughby, perhaps, had he chosen another for her escort—for what must happen but that, when they approached the village of Slough, whence Windsor is clearly to be discerned, the lad suddenly recollected Sir Richard's presence at the castle and made mention of it.

"The King, they say, is very pleased with him, Kitty," he remarked, in a generous impulse not to be restrained.

To this Kitty replied by the first earnest word she had spoken since they quitted Brighton.

"Then Sir Richard has been to London again, cousin?"

"Not once since you were there. They tell the oddest things of him—were Medmenham a monstery in fact as well as name, Sir Dick would be the very man for a habit in the place."

Kitty thought upon this for a little while, and presently she said:

"Why do you speak to me of Sir Richard, cousin—why does every one speak to me of him?"

"Because we all thought that you loved him, Kitty."

"And you, cousin—did you believe it?"

"Could I help it, Kitty? If it had not been so, if I had not thought it so, would not I have told you long ago what I have always been afraid to tell you, Kitty?"

Here was a declaration if you like; and what would have

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followed upon it, but for Kitty's discretion, God only knows. Young Willoughby, a great hope returning to him, had no other desire than to catch Kitty in his arms and, holding her close, to take an oath that no day of his life would separate them again—which folly, perchance, he would have committed had not he surprised her pretty eyes regarding the distant castle so wistfully that all her secret was to be read in an instant and his own supreme desire froze at his heart. Kitty, however, wished still to deceive him, and speaking very kindly, she said:

"I shall never learn to love, cousin; it is a lesson no one can teach me."

"Ah, Kitty, if I could believe that! Look in my eyes and tell me it is the truth."

"No, no!" she cried; "the sun is setting, and it blinds me, cousin; look! all the west is aflame. I cannot speak of it. And now the castle is far behind us; oh, do not let us talk of it any more, cousin."

He obeyed her without a word. This knowledge—that whatever her lips might say, her heart was another man's—came to him as a sad echo of the declining day and an omen of that night through which, it seemed, all who loved Kitty Dulcimore must live.

"She will marry Richard Escombe or she will never marry at all," said Ensign Willoughby; and then, with an instinctive dread of that which had been done, he asked himself: "What will he say—what will London say—of last night's work?"

But this was a question the future alone could answer, and how it answered it we shall presently tell.



XXII

SIR RICHARD HEARS THE NEWS



OW, the news of this affair came to Sir Richard Escombe some fifteen days after Kitty had arrived at her aunt's house, and he had it, curiously enough, by the mouths of our old friends Captains Beddoe and Rupert, then quartered with the Dragoons in the town of Windsor itself.

The occasion had been one of those quasi-public dinners which Soldier George, who cared nothing for privacy, had given to the officers of his garrison in Charles II.'s dining-room—a considerable apartment, as we know, lying over against the Privy Lodgings.

Here, when he was at Windsor, His Majesty dined, that all the world might see him eat, and here, when a soldier's mood sat easily upon him, he gathered his officers about him and discussed Dettingen again and what that grand Seigneur Louis was doing over the water, to say nothing of other tittle-tattle not to be repeated to refined ears, but very characteristic of a German court.

Let it be said at once that if Richard Escombe cared little for these functions, it was not because he was lacking in that *joie de vivre* so characteristic of his people. He would crack a bottle, cut a card, fling a dance, or draw a sword with

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any man; but the Irish blood in him ran hostile to the whole German nation, and a truly Celtic love of refinement in his relations with women made his heart sick at much of the talk he had heard. So the ponderous banquets and the shining gold plate and the huge roasts and the countless bottles drove him not only to melancholy, but to escape—a flight in which many of the younger officers joined him—whenever a decent opportunity presented itself.

On this particular evening of the dinner to the garrison, retreat was not such an easy matter. A gracious King with the best part of two bottles inside of him and an incurable partiality for drawing plans of a battle-field upon a white cloth and illustrating the whole with the rind of an apple and the stones from the plums—this gracious personage was not readily diverted from his purpose—and it was nearly nine o'clock, in fact (the dinner having begun at four), when he stood up and dismissed the company with a hiccup, whereupon the men dispersed according to the habits and the capacity of the individual. Of the younger officers many would appear to have been carried immediately to their bedrooms by stalwart troopers who had been looking about for that very purpose; older tongues spoke of rubbers of whist or a little hazard; Sir Richard, alone among them all, would have returned to his apartment and his bed but for Captain Rupert's hand laid suddenly upon his arm and the far from dulcet voice of Captain Beddoe whispering in his ear:

"Have you heard the news, Escombe?"

"Of whom?" was the quick retort.

"Ask Cunningham; he rode in from St. James's to-night. He'll tell you of a whip; you must ask him for yourself."

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"But do not press him too far," suggested Rupert, blandly; "an unwilling witness is the devil."

Escombe heard them with little civility. These two men bored him desperately; he was very tired of Windsor—had he but known it, tired of almost everything that life had to offer him.

"Am I a jibbing horse that you should speak to me of whips? The devil take your whips," said he.

"Well, as you like; but our old friend Harborne doesn't think so. And across the face, my boy. Adonis with a bandage over his left eye, or, better, Diana running all the way to Brighton at eleven o'clock of a summer's night."

"And the Ensign conveniently ready at the gate. Well, that settles your debt, Escombe. Here's the boy running away with the silver bowl and you left with the paper. Did you hear they were a week in London together, and now she goes to her aunt's house at Marlow and is playing shepherdess to a rural Pan? I think you're devilishly well out of that, and so does Cunningham. Why, man, all the town is laughing at Harborne; there will be whips of diamonds before a week is out, and the pamphlets have a print of the post-chaise. Ask Cunningham. He's a rare man of the world, is Cunningham."

"Tell Escombe he's a lucky dog," said Cunningham. "We haven't forgotten the message, eh, Rupert?"

"By no means, Beddoe; our memories remain unimpaired in spite of George's claret."

So their tongues wagged; so, piece by piece, Sir Richard put the puzzle together and tried to make a whole of it. We shall credit him with no superhuman virtue when we say that the malice of it stung him despite his good faith. Men may trust a woman's heart and yet be ashamed of her

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prudence. He would have staked his life upon Kitty's honor, and yet he detected instantly both the folly and the consequence of this adventure.

What could men think of it—what must women say of it? Three days upon the road, boy and girl together. Are we to be surprised that this man, no wiser than other men nor free from their common weaknesses, could stand a moment in the darkness of the terrace and ask himself if faith hereafter were a possibility?

His Kitty thus branded! His Kitty thus driven—and he perceived clearly how she had been driven—to do that which must be remembered against her though she lived a hundred years! And upon what did the blame of that surpassing misfortune lie? Dick could have struck the very walls in his anger when he remembered that a word from him might have saved her, and that his procrastination had brought this scandalous talk upon her.

Why had he put off the meeting with Harborne so long? Good God! why had he permitted such a man to live? These were the questions he asked himself when he walked over to his quarters. These were his bitter thoughts when he commanded the astonished Barry to have him a horse saddled, and determined that he would ride to Marlow immediately.

"There has been overmuch liquor drunk in the King's parlor, Barry. I would ride it off in the King's park."

"Ye would ride! Holy saints, listen to him! Is it your honor I am hearing or the King's liquor?"

"Obey me, man; I am in no humor to-night. My horse immediately, and be damned to your music. Do you hear me, Barry?"

"'Tis a voice I hear, surely, but whether it be your hon-

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or's or another's the blessed Providence alone can tell me. Would it be two horses or one?"

"But one, Barry. Man goes best alone in these days to the end, man—to the end."

Barry went out complaining; but he ordered the horse to be saddled none the less, and half an hour had not passed before Richard Escombe cantered off to Marlow, as angry, obsessed, and distant a man as any in Berkshire that night. We, upon our part, do not profess to know what object was in his head—either the purpose of his adventure or the impulse which sent him upon it—but we can properly imagine that some vague thought of Kitty's presence at Marlow, some determination to undo in a twinkling all the wrong that had been done these long months past, sent him abroad when others were in their beds, and forbade him sleep whatever the hour.

He must see her; he must know the truth. Just as though he had it not already, but that it would become a more precious possession if spoken by her lips! And here is to be perceived a sudden bursting of the bonds of pride which had contrived all this mischief and led to the *impasse*.

After all, he would argue, what has pride done for any man in all the world where woman is the object of it? Did it ever win her love, achieve her happiness, or make her more beloved? Dick Escombe, indeed, apprehended more truths in that hour than he had ever learned in all his years. He had been a madman, blind, and a fool; but he thanked God there was still time to repair the mischief, and repaired he swore that it should be before another sun had set. Happy resolution! odd irony of fate that to-morrow should find him as far away from Kitty's heart as though the sea stood between them!

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Now, he had chosen a bridle-path by the river for his journey, and this he followed all the way to the ferry at Taplow. This was a month when the moon did not rise until nearly midnight, but she rewarded him richly for her tardiness when at last she burst through a film of summer clouds and showed all that river landscape in primitive and unspoiled beauty.

No fine villas then by the water-side, no caterers for the people's custom, no house-boats, no toil and stress of pleasure—but the river calm and placid, and the wild iris unkempt, and the great floating lilies and the silent woods and the sleeping grass-lands, and here and there the black farm-house to speak for to-morrow's awakening and the common labor of the day. Sir Dick, in truth, rode through a country which might have been a hundred miles removed from any city, and when at last he came to the place of the ferry he found but a sleeping village and hardly a watchdog to herald his approach.

And so on a broader road to Marlow—and what apprehensions, what odd thoughts at his approach! Should he go boldly to Kitty's gate at this time of night or wait a better opportunity? Was it madness to believe that she would forgive him for his audacity, or must reason send him back to his bed?

Be sure that his anger against her had cooled by this time, and that it was the old Dick who reined in his horse when he discovered the house (for that had long been known to him), and asked himself in which of those darkened rooms Kitty slept, and what would be said of him if he aroused the servants at such a time.

This argument, fortunately, was not pursued further. Every page of this record goes to prove that a pistol, and

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not reason, decided the point of issue for Richard Escombe that night. And it was a pistol fired under his very horse's nose, twenty paces from the gates, so dexterously, so surprisingly, that the startled brute bolted headlong for Henley, and Hercules himself, you might have said, would never have held him.

Now a man who has a horse bolt with him rarely remembers much of the circumstances. He recollects but a sudden plunge, utters perhaps but a startled exclamation, and then is carried to the heart of that mad excitement (and chiefly the excitement of the issue) which is not to be surpassed in any circumstance.

Those who questioned Sir Richard Escombe concerning his experience upon this memorable night learned but little for their pains. He told them of Kitty's house—he remembered very well how it stood out in the moonlight, its white walls catching the generous beams, a fine yew hedge about it, and a pair of considerable gates opening upon a drive. Here he had taken his stand when the unknown miscreant fired a pistol at him, from which moment he had but the poorest recollection of the affair.

Certainly the road was winding and narrow. A great moon shone overhead, there was a wonderful heaven of stars, but he had been a miracle of a horseman who had regarded these things with that thunder of hoofs in his ears and that black uncertainty of the end before him.

How the brute galloped! Dick said. What a devil of fury seemed to possess him! Had wolves howled at his heels he could not have bettered his speed. Headlong down the river road to Henley, stones flying, dust enveloping them in a pungent cloud, here swinging to the right, there to the left, upon one hand a view of the moonlit Thames itself,

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upon the other the thick woods and wide pastures above Hambledon, so the flight went; and as it went Sir Dick could have cried aloud for the excitement of it.

What a gamble with life, he thought! What a play of fortune, that any hazard of the road—a cart, a ditch, a gate—might solve the eternal problem on the instant! And he, renowned horseman that he was, to sit as helpless as a child, listening to that thundering music of the gallop, watching the trees and gates fly by, asking always what will be the end of it, where shall we come down?

So they went by the first of the villages, the clatter drawing eyes to the windows, but too late to espy who passed. Near to Hambledon Sir Dick discerned for the first time other figures upon the road; but they were not those he might have looked for at such a time, being fine gentlemen of the highway, cloaked and laced and bejewelled, and they all rode up together from the old Franciscan monastery by Medmenham, that was a monastery no more.

These greeted the rider with resounding cheers, offered to wager their beasts against his own, and left him with a salvo of their drunken wit in his ears. Some clearer thought coming to him even at such a moment, he remembered that they would be the sorry rogues of the famous club at Medmenham, and he cried back to them with a view-halloa. Upon which, as it is written, his horse reared suddenly, either at the sound of the voice or the shadow of a branch upon the path, and, being unable to keep his legs, the brute leaped the high hedge upon the right-hand side of the way, and fell heavily, with Sir Dick, bruised and white and insensible, beneath him, or, as that good man Jasper Clegg the cottager believed, “as surely gone to his Maker as I’m a living man.”

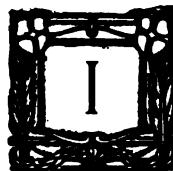


Sir Richard Escombe

In which good keeping we must leave our friend for the moment—to the charity of an honest yeoman and of his good wife Anne, whose womanly heart was touched to pity that such a proper gentleman should be brought to such a piteous condition.

XXIII

HIS LORDSHIP PLEASES



T would be very natural that a man of such discernment as Frederick Viscount Harborne should have been much dissatisfied with his venture at Brighton. He had hoped much from the primitive seclusion of a healthy village, but had achieved no more than a pamphlet which, as he swore most solemnly, should consign the writer to Newgate could he, His Lordship, but lay a kindly hand upon him.

This, we are glad to say, was a fate which did not overtake an excellent cynic. The unknown poet who had the audacity to rhyme "thong" or "wrong" and "fog" to "ancient dog" contrived to safeguard his anonymity in the purlieus of Grub Street. His Lordship meanwhile returned to town, and there announced, with suitable thunders of voice and manner, his determination to exterminate the Dulcimores root and branch—not leaving, as it were, one leaf upon another.

Men did not spare each other in the days when George was King. In spite of the law of libel, there was a great deal of plain speaking in the world—and this did not concern men only. In a common way, it is possible to believe that the town, remembering my lord, would not have forgotten

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Kitty Dulcimore; but let it be said for the chivalry of a far from chivalrous age that it remembered her both to her credit and her enduring reputation.

Harborne's most eloquent attempts to make something of her flight from Brighton with the Ensign recoiled but on his own head. Many a defender at many a coffee-house raised a glass to the girl who had dared to whip a lord and then to bolt from his house in the first chaise she came upon. And to give little Willoughby his due, he fought a good fight in Kitty's interest, telling her story everywhere, giving the fullest account of my lord's behavior; and so making a goddess of one who had better played a Phyllis, he established such a name and fortune for Kitty Dulcimore in the City that, had she but returned there, she would have found half the gallants in the place at her feet.

Kitty, however, was snug in the old house at Marlow, where that very remarkable old lady, Elizabeth Dulcimore, her father's sister, watched the fray from afar and did not cease to delight in it.

Now we should like to say much about Aunt Elizabeth, for certainly she was a sterling old woman. Born some sixty years before this story began, she had once been to London to make her bow to good Queen Anne, and never had the circumstance been forgotten. Why, the very coach was still in the stable at Marlow—such a wreck of paint and leather and varnish that the villagers themselves mocked it when abroad; in spite of whom the old lady continued to parade it and to ride therein, stiff-backed and proud, as when a girl it had carried her to St. James's.

And what talk she had of Oxford and of Bolingbroke and even of the great Duke himself!

"Ah, my dear," it would be, "we are fallen upon strange

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times, as the good Queen always said would be the case"; or, in another mood, "This would never have happened had the Duke been alive"; or, again, "I wonder what His Lordship would have said to the Queen if this had been in his time?"

In truth, she talked as though Queen Anne had known no dearer friend, while the facts were that she had seen that excellent woman but once, for five minutes, perhaps, and had never spoken a word either to my lord the Earl of Oxford or to Bolingbroke, the politician, in all her life.

Such was the old lady to whom Kitty fled at Marlow—kindly, reminiscent, brocaded, magisterial. Her dresses were wonders from a forgotten generation; her silver hair hung upon her shoulders in curled ringlets that should have been a fashion to a child. She was a high Tory in politics, despite her allegiance to Anne, and firmly believed that the country would never be saved until a Queen came to reign again.

Imagine with what delight this secluded politician heard of Kitty's adventure! She had almost ignored the child's existence until that dusty chaise drew up and the story of the whole sad business was poured into her eager ear. Hoping at the first that the Ensign might prove to be a worthy blood, but losing all interest in him directly she perceived the true condition of affairs, Elizabeth settled herself down to a very feast of gossip such as she had not known since her childhood.

"And so ye ran away from brother Anthony, and he's racing round the country after the quality? Well, my dear, your father was never much better than a lunatic, as the good Queen used to tell me. You did well to come to me, child. I'll write to him at once; I'll send an express to

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London. Have no fear, my poor Kitty; Elizabeth, who was the good Queen's friend, she will protect you. And so it is Lord Harborne who has been persecuting my niece! The impudence of the man that is but a third Viscount! Will you tell the story again—from the beginning, child? Surely you did well to come to me, for I was born to a courtier's part, as my Lord Bolingbroke never tired of telling me. Come, child, speak plainly to your old aunt, who is a woman of the world, as some of them will presently discover. Remember that you have a home here while I live. And I'm not one to be dying yet awhile—not to oblige the Viscount, if I know it, Kitty."

Such was the spirit of her entreaty for a good week or more. The story, and nothing but the story! Had my lord this way of saying a thing? Ah, well, that was so unlike the Earl. Would his eyes be brown—she remembered that Lord Bolingbroke's were blue. Did he speak of marriage—ah, what villains men were since the good Queen died! And she, Kitty, had thrashed him with a whip! That was a Dulcimore all over! Aunt Elizabeth would cackle in her great chair for a full ten minutes after each recital. A whip! Lord, what a thing for St. James's to hear!

"It could not be more fortunate, Kitty," she would say. "Men differ but little from the horses, as the Earl never forgot to tell me. For some the gloved hand, and for others the whip. We shall have His Lordship down here before the month has run; he will remember that I met his father at St. James's, and I shall have a pretty story to tell him. Oh, he won't frighten me—never saw I the man who could bring the blush to my cheeks. But we must write to your father, child; we must let him know that you are in safe-keeping,

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and that I will see this matter to the end. Never speak to me about returning to Warwickshire. What, to leave an old woman to die alone! Don't let it be said that my own niece was willing to do that."

Kitty very properly declared that she had no such intention. It is quite true to say that the old lady's eccentric notions alarmed her not a little, and perhaps she perceived that she had but walked out of the frying-pan into the fire. Indeed, not many days had passed before it became quite plain to Kitty that Aunt Elizabeth hoped to meet Lord Harborne and hear the whole story from His Lordship's truthful lips. She herself was at present in too considerable a state of uncertainty to offer any opposition to this quest of an aristocratic acquaintance, and, believing in the improbability of its execution, she consented, having written very firmly to her mother, to continue to reside at Marlow, there to await the future confidently, and to permit fortune to deal with her as it would.

And were there no remembrances of Richard Escombe in this consent? We should judge Mistress Kitty with but little justice if we denied that unconfessed hope which animated her while at Marlow. Was not Sir Richard at Windsor, but a few paltry miles away, as the Ensign had reminded her? Would he not hear of her presence in the village? Must this folly of misunderstanding separate them eternally? Kitty knew now that if Dick came to her she would forgive him all. She imagined no reason which might prevent him coming—imagined none, that is to say, until Aunt Elizabeth herself suggested one, and he no other than Ensign Willoughby, who had carried her from Brighton.

"No fault of yours, child—none at all. You did what was right and proper, and I'm sure I should have done the

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same myself. But we mustn't forget that others won't see the thing with our eyes. Here's a fine nobleman beaten like a horse, and a lad waiting for you at the gate. Kitty, Kitty, it's the lad waiting for us at the gate the world is always so anxious to see. They'll make a dozen of him if they can, especially since the nobility's concerned. Mark my words, child, Lord Harborne will already have been in the writers' hands, and a rare drubbing they will give him. But you, child—they'll look for you at the gate, and be certain they'll find you if they mean it."

"But, my dear aunt, what is the world's opinion to me? Am I one of your politicians that I should mind it at all?"

"You are just a simple little girl who knows very little of life, my dear. God bless us and save us, hark to the child! And, Kitty, be sure your husband will not wish to have it said that you rode the night through and rested in London with an Ensign of the Guards who is about to be made a lieutenant for his notoriety."

"They will never dare to say it, aunt."

"Oh, come! The world is not brave, then, when a woman's reputation is the enemy? You'll have to learn, my dear. You'll know my meaning some day, and be sorry for it. We'll do our best, Kitty. The Lord only knows what may come of it; but that folk will talk about you is as sure as the sun in the heavens this day—and that's bright enough, as my poor old eyes tell me."

The old lady spoke honestly enough—nor may we judge her hardly. She knew nothing of that great secret which now caused Mistress Kitty's face to color as the leaf of a red rose, her heart to beat wildly, and the tears to start to her eyes. That this should be said of her! And that Dick might come to hear of it! Oh, what a simpleton she had

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been; how lacking in self-resource and in courage! Of course, she perceived now that the severest judgment would be pronounced upon her folly, that men would name her with pity and women with contempt; but for this she would have cared very little, had it not been for the thought that Sir Richard must surely come to hear of it, and that her pride forbade her to explain.

Truly had some malign influence of destiny chosen to blight every heart-hope where her love for Richard Escombe was concerned. She knew that Dick would suffer because of her folly, and yet perceived no way by which folly might be redeemed—unless she stooped to it and spoke the word.

Let us say briefly that this sensible resolution ultimately prevailed. Unknown to the vigilant Aunt Elizabeth, Kitty sent a messenger to Windsor to Dick's rooms, and waited for the answer with an expectancy that was almost a torture. Oh, he would come to her, she said—he would come upon the instant. Just as, for her sake, he had ridden into London at the risk of his honor and his place, so now would Dick respond to her, whatever the cost. Never had Kitty Dulcimore spent such hours as those which attended the writing and despatch of that memorable letter—never did the day drag to its end so wearily. Every step in the lane would send her running to the window; the sound of a horse's hoofs upon the drive so brought the blood to her cheeks that she came near to falling for very giddiness. And then the cruel rebuff—the unexpected truth!

Sir Richard was not at his quarters, the messenger said. He had met with an accident upon the road and his life was in some jeopardy. When he returned, if he ever did return, the letter should be faithfully delivered to him. For the moment it was out of the question to think of it.



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And with this for her consolation, Kitty must sit that night and answer the old woman's questions about my lord, and hear her shrewish cackle while she repeated the story. "His life is in jeopardy—he will never know that I wrote to him!"



Book III

The Habit of St. Francis





XXIV

THE PURLIEUS OF THE MONASTERY



PISTOL-SHOT upon the road to Medmenham was accounted no startling thing in the days when Soldier George was King and Master John Wilkes led the unspeakable revels at Medmenham Abbey.

Of these we shall have much to say presently, but it is necessary first to remark that Elizabeth Dulcimore made light of the many stories which came from the club to her willing ears, and that even a scandalous outrage, faithfully reported by her amiable man-servant Williams, could but provoke her to say that such a thing was common among the nobility when Anne, her friend, had been Queen.

So it will be apparent that the particular pistol-shot which scared our friend Sir Richard's horse made less than no stir at all among Elizabeth's household.

"Just one of the gentlemen riding back from Medmenham to London," the servants said, "and firing his pistol because his heart was light."

Had the truth been known it might not have been received with such equanimity. No merry gentleman, to be sure, had fired the shot; no frolic had provoked it; but the malice of a rogue we have seen before, my lord's willing agent Cockraine, who, with that other tool, no less servile,



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Musgrove, watched Elizabeth Dulcimore's house frequently after Kitty arrived there, and lost no time whatever in presenting acceptable reports to his impatient lordship.

Upon the evening in question Cockraine and Musgrove, having learned nothing during the day, had set off for London a little after midnight—just as others of the ruffianly company did—and, chancing by accident to meet Sir Richard Escombe upon the heath, they had been at the pains of following him, as we have seen, firing a pistol at last in mere drunken devilry, and certainly with no direct intention to commit a felony. When this was done and the mad horse had bolted, the two men returned at once to Medmenham, there to give my lord a full account of it—a journey which permits us an opportunity of paying our first visit to that famous club (if it be but to its purlieus), and there of overhearing an interesting conversation, also of learning something about a society as noteworthy as it was infamous.

Now, the Medmenham Club was first founded by Sir Francis Dashwood, afterward the Lord Despencer, a few years prior to the opening of this story. John Wilkes, who wrote the scandalous essay on women and also gave the people's tongues the tick of crying "Liberty"—this man was early among its members, as also were Lords Sandwich and Churchill, Bobb, Doddington, and others we have already met. There had been, as every ecclesiastical historian knows, a Cistercian abbey at Medmenham in the year 1204, but this went to ruin at the Dissolution, and it was among its ruins that Sir Francis Dashwood established his mock community of Franciscans.

To what extent time and the fables have exaggerated the practices and the diversions of these men it is quite impossible to say. Such records of the club as concern this nar-

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tive have but little to do with the pseudo-monkish ritual or the particular virtues of the community.

Let it be sufficient to write that the club flourished exceedingly while Sir Richard Escombe was at Windsor, and that some years previously he himself had been a member of it. With which foreword we may hasten after those two pretty ruffians, Musgrove and Cockraine, and follow them down the winding road toward the ruined abbey at Medmenham.

Very content with themselves, riding quite at their leisure, and animated perhaps by the thought of offering once more those libations which they had regarded as already at an end, they did not hurry themselves at all, and had but the pleasantest word for such of their comrades as they met by the way. To these briefly they would put the question whether a horseman had passed them by, and being answered in the affirmative and told that he was "riding like the devil," their satisfaction was maintained and continued unabated until the lights of the abbey came to their view. Here instantly, at the very road-side, they were challenged by a harsh voice which asked them what they did.

To which Musgrove replied:

"*Que voudras*—and his amiable lordship. Has he yet ridden out, brother?"

"No," said the voice, sharply, "nor will he ride this twelve hours. Is there news, then, on the road?"

"A man and a horse—and it may be a hurdle. We shall know to-morrow—but my lord must know to-night."

They passed on down a bridle-path, the river shining gloriously before them, and all that sylvan country resplendent in the magic of the witching moonbeams. The abbey itself was now almost in darkness, save for a little glimmer of

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light in a room over against the ancient refectory. To this the men directed their horses, while great hounds, black as coal and horribly fanged, came sniffing about them but uttered no sound. At the door of the abbey itself an immense man, with a brace of pistols thrust in his girdle, challenged them again and with but little civility in his tone.

"The office is done, brethren—what brings you here?"

"*Que voudras*—and a man upon a horse. We come for my lord—"

"I know nothing of my lord—"

"Then, being from the devil, we come for Anthony," cried Musgrove, quickly. "Go tell him that his friends bring news. He will hear it willingly enough if he have ears for anything at all."

"Or being asleep," said Cockraine, "will thank you to rouse him to such music."

They pushed their way in and found themselves in a stone anteroom, very bare as to its walls, but its floor carpeted with a great crimson rug crossed by cabalistic signs and evidently from the East. A single lamp with a crimson glass gave light to the place. The motto, "*Fay ce que voudras!*" in letters of gold upon a green ground, stood conspicuous above the doorway; a long corridor beyond had little lamps and, as it were, shrines at intervals. Clever eyes might have seen cloaked men rolled up in the alcoves and fast asleep, regardless of the stone beds beneath them. This had been but a simple affair to-night and no great zest about it—not one of the greater festivals, when your brothers of St. Francis caroused for forty hours on end, but just a fling at the hazard and a score of bottles cracked, and then some to London, and some who had no heads for wine

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fast asleep upon the stone floor until they were fit to ride again.

My Lord Harborne was not to be put in the latter category. Claiming the fuller privileges of the club, he had been living at Medmenham Abbey since the day he learned that Kitty Dulcimore had gone from Brighton to Marlow. What he hoped of his presence there, if not the malice of requital, no man can say. But there he had pitched his tent, and there, presently, in a pretty little bedroom overlooking the river—a room with moss-roses climbing about its windows and such furniture as a red-cheeked country girl might have desired—the men found him and told their story. To which my lord responded by calling immediately for another bottle and cracking it upon the instant, though the gray dawn crept already across the river and the twitter of the birds heralded the day.

"There is no doubt of it, my lord—Sir Richard Escombe as plain as I see Your Lordship this instant."

Harborne, sitting upon the edge of that which might have been a child's bed, his hair disordered, a fine silk dressing-gown thrown hastily about his shoulders, but looking very old and worn and malicious in that searching light—he listened to Cockraine and must answer, sardonically:

"There are few who see well at this time of day. But I doubt not that if you made out two of them, one would be his own brother. Say you the horse bolted with him?"

"As though Your Lordship had whispered a word in his ear."

"Then they'll bury him at Reading. What put it into your wise head to fire a pistol after him, Cockraine?"

"The reflection that the report might awake Your Lordship to some sense of obligation. On my solemn word of

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honor as a gentleman, I was riding to London without a guinea—so, says I: 'Here's as good as asking His Lordship for fifty and getting his note.' ”

Harborne looked at him very shrewdly.

“You have had a good deal of my money lately, Cock-raine. What have you done for it?”

“Fought Your Lordship's battles in many a tavern. I'm a living pamphlet, my lord. Grub Street could not better me at ten pounds the sheet. Let them lift a toast to Kitty Dulcimore and I am on my feet directly. 'Drink it next month when you know the truth,' say I—‘perhaps a little later might be wisdom—but the truth, gentlemen, the truth.’ That goes well with a wink and a nod, though the horse may not be blind. Another six months of it—or again I say, perhaps later still—but Your Lordship will be the judge. I am sure if we have the lady here—”

“Here!” cried my lord, an odd look suddenly coming to his eyes—“what could we do with the lady here?”

“That must be for Your Lordship to say. I was speaking, as Whitehead would have it, by metaphor. And yet—blessed inspiration—there's no reason why it should not be done. Given a couple of men and a third to make it worth their while—d'ye see, my lord; you would not want an eloquent tongue after that. Kitty Dulcimore the guest of the gentlemen of Medmenham! A white night and hoods down, perhaps the ladies from Covent Garden with us! She spends a pleasant hour here and goes on, while the tale is at the coffee-houses almost before it is written. You would not need our services again, after that, my lord.”

“Certainly,” said my lord, rising with an odd grin upon his face—“certainly I should not.”

XXV

MY LORD PLOTS MISCHIEF



E drained a ruby glass of claret and walked slowly to the window. What an idea was that, and by what an accident had it not come! Kitty Dulcimore the guest of the Franciscans! Would her reputation survive that? Had she not slashed him, Frederick, third Viscount, across his noble nose? Did not London yet laugh at him? And his very weapons recoiled upon himself. No one believed his story of the Ensign and the fight. Many openly called him a villain. Must he refuse thus providentially to justify himself? A woman of fashion among the monks of Medmenham! The very gutters would cry upon her. Oh, be sure my lord grinned at that!

"You say it could be done, Cockraine?" he exclaimed, turning from the window presently. "How could it be done?"

"My lord, there are wits enough between the three of us. If honeyed talk will command the lady, bespeak the services of my friend Musgrove upon the instant. Never have I known him wanting."

My lord looked sharply at Musgrove.

"Many have talked to Kitty Dulcimore," he said, and paused.



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"But not of Sir Richard Escombe," was the slow reply; "if he lives, my lord, some tale of him might serve."

"Or dies—why, that would be better still," said Cockraine. "She'd ride a hundred leagues to see him, if what young Willoughby says is true."

"And you—" But here my lord stopped, abruptly, and the whole fount of his eloquence dried up instantly. This was a highly dangerous business. It might bring a neck to the gallows, he remembered. Prudence whispered that he must have no part or lot in it—at least, publicly.

"I am dull this morning," he exclaimed, suddenly; "come to me at mid-day, Cockraine, alone. I shall be ready for you then."

"As Your Lordship pleases; we'll ride to Reading meanwhile and get the news. At twelve o'clock."

And so they took their leave; but my lord, they say, did not move from the window. The sun had risen by this time and shone gloriously upon the freshening river. All the woods were alive to the music of the birds; laborers began to work in the fields; cattle lowed; a distant church clock chimed the hour of five very sweetly. In the gardens below some evidence of last night's carousal contrasted but ill with this beauty and fragrance of the morn. There were boats still at the stage; they had carried many a pretty rogue from Windsor last night, and left him with throbbing head and empty purse upon the floor of the great stone corridor to-day. But that which chiefly occupied my lord's attention was the great ruined refectory of Medmenham Abbey, now hung all about with heavy curtains; its monstrous mysteries veiled; its galleries silent; its detestable shrines unvisited.

He saw this vast apartment lighted by a thousand tapers;

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he heard the music of fiddles and flutes therein; he watched with voluptuous eyes the Eastern dancers who had helped their revels many a time; called in imagination for the great tankards of wine; listened to the clamor of the mighty chaplain—gamed, diced, danced, drank, as Medmenham alone permitted in the hour of the frenzy.

And defiant amid all this ribaldry and debauch, my lord perceived in his imagination the gentle figure of Kitty Dulcimore, lured thereto by a trick and compelled in one brief hour to pay the uttermost farthing for the affront she had put upon him.

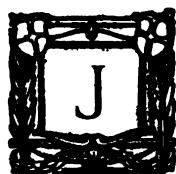
“She would never lift her head again,” he said to himself, softly. “There is not a man, the meanest in the three kingdoms, who would speak to her of marriage after such a night. And yet, if I—”

He shut the window sharply and returned to his bed. Such dreams as he had made a hero of him—in which most valiantly he would rescue Kitty Dulcimore from the infamous snare he himself had set for her, and, having rescued her, would startle the world by making her his wife. And this was a delicious sleep indeed—the most refreshing my lord had known for many a day.



XXVI

BARRY BRINGS THE NEWS OF IT



JASPER CLEGG was bailiff to Lord Hambleton, who had the big house up on the hills above Henley and owned the land for many a mile around. A worthy man, he served a worthy master—expressing civility in some twenty words of the King's English and his philosophy of life in two hundred more, perhaps.

As for his good wife Anne, she would tell you that her mission in life was to be minding her own business—which she did to such good effect that a cleaner, prettier cottage or a more exemplary household was not known in all the parish.

“Do for others after you've done for yourself”—an ambiguous precept, added to another, “Never bring an empty bucket from the well,” were Dame Anne's rules of life.

If Jasper flogged her twice per annum (as he did once after the Michaelmas Fair and again to keep Christmas) she never made any complaint of that. The Book said it was right and proper. “Spare the rod and spoil the child”—and in spite of her forty odd years Dame Anne had never grown up. In fact, her aged parents, living in a neighboring village, still expressed their doubts if they would ever rear her.

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"She be that weak on the chest," they said—a fact you never would have guessed had you heard the good creature calling a dog from the yard or winding the buckets from the well aforesaid.

Now, to the keeping of this worthy couple accident intrusted our friend Sir Richard Escombe. He was twelve hours unconscious after his mishap, and for another twelve hours able to give only the poorest account of himself. Indeed, at the first, Dame Anne assuredly thought him to be gone, and, setting a candle before his eyes, she asked him, in touching good faith, whether he were dead or no. This question he appears to have answered by an unconscious groan—so emphatic, however, that Jasper at once hoisted the inanimate figure upon his shoulders and carried it to the best parlor, wherein it was to lie for some ten long days.

"He baint dead, Anne—and I can't rightly say he be alive. You see, wumman, we must all come to it whether we carry a silken purse or a sow's ear. Do you make some water hot while I run down to Mr. Simmons to let the blood out of him. Belike he was riding up to His Lardship's—ay, wumman, if that were so, this be a lucky night for us, be sure on it."

So, you see, some thoughts of personal gain entered into the good man's head, as it will creep into most minds when the common course of life is disturbed and profit looms vaguely upon a homely horizon.

As for old Anne, she said at once that it would be as good as a pound note to them—and briskly she hustled, we must say, tidying up the little parlor, lighting a good fire in the kitchen grate, and generally preparing for the visit of that important personage, Mr. Simmons, the barber, who drew blood with a sangfroid and an address not to be surpassed

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in Oxfordshire. This fine fellow declared immediately that Sir Richard would live—but, as he added, ominously, “If you had not sent for me, then God help him.”

It would be tedious to dwell upon the succeeding stages of this primitive, if kindly, treatment. Let it suffice to say that Sir Dick recovered consciousness next day, that for twenty-four hours he was too dazed and shaken to remember much of the fatality, and that afterward, regaining his sense wholly, he found himself with such a bruised and twisted ankle that any attempt to stand upon it was accompanied by intolerable agony. In which condition, and being advised by the surgeon from Windsor, he determined, having no good alternative, to spend a few days with old Jasper in the cottage. To which end he summoned Barry from the castle, and, having reported himself to the authorities, was presently installed in Dame Anne’s parlor, to that old woman’s unaffected satisfaction and the chronic annoyance of the splenetic Irishman.

“Sure, is there no coach that will take ye back to Windsor?” Barry would ask his master.

“Many, Barry,” the answer would go, “but none so much to my liking that I have the intention to call it.”

“Twas another man ye were at the French court. To be making the dogs bark for a hurt a child would laugh upon. Oh, ay, ‘tis a broke spine I’ll have to be telling of when we go back. Shall I have them laugh at ye? ‘He fell with the horse underneath,’ says I, ‘and me the man that lifted them together out of the ditch!’ Oh, ay, and a fine old woman to keep the house for ye. Were it another, I might have me thoughts. Whist, master, ‘tis not old Anne ye be afther?”

By which it will be perceived that the excellent Barry was

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perfectly well aware of the reasons which kept his master at the cottage, and that the human weakness thereby declared excited nothing but his contempt.

"Twas for Kitty's sake, and no denial possible. Ah, the vanity of the man!—to be lying there with no more hurt than a sprained ankle, pitying himself as a child pities the limb that is bruised, and saying all the time: "Should she hear of it, she will come to me—she must hear, for news goes fast in a place like this."

"And then she'll ride over," Sir Dick would say, "and I'll tell how I came here and what I went to Marlow to say, and she'll know at last, and that will be the end of all the folly, and never more, etc.," as a lover will in moments almost of a feminine tenderness. This, be sure, could not be hidden from Barry, who fluted it with a new vigor and spent idle hours quarrelling with Dame Anne, whose homely precepts had no place in his philosophy. Sir Dick could hear them almost hourly wrangling in the little patch of garden before the cottage windows.

"Do for others after you've done for yourself," old Anne would say, to which Barry's retort unfailingly would be:

"Let it be quick, woman—ay, I'll bring the rope if 'tis hanging ye choose."

Or this:

"If my old man blew a thing like that, I'd souse his head in the river."

"'Tis yourself that would never know him afterward. What, water! Woman, 'twould be the death of him!"

"There's some could be better spared."

"And some that God Almighty married when he was angry with them."

"A fine thing of a man to be blowing a whistle all day."

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“To drown the sound of your voice, me darlint. Hist!
I might marry ye yet if ye caught me afther a bottle.”

And so on and so on, the lame man listening meanwhile and laughing beneath the bedclothes. What a sham the whole business was, and yet how much of the true life in all that environed sham!

Here in this humble cottage Sir Richard seemed closer to nature, better able to understand the subtle fascinations of Mother Earth than he had been since a child. The odor of the roses, the perfume of the land, the scent of bush and bramble—these were wafted up from the river upon gentle breezes, and accompanied by an intoxication of the senses as new as it was natural. And upon it all the simplicity of the life, the easy content, the limitation upon desire which he found in the cottage. Here, surely, was a sermon upon the whole art of life such as the town might never preach. And it deceived with a false promise, as such sermons ever will.

Richard Escombe, we observe, left many things out of his sylvan reckonings—and chiefly this: that Kitty was at Marlow, and that he would certainly ride straight to her house directly he could set foot in a stirrup. His romantic desire, wholly Celtic, that she should discover accidentally the story of his mishap, should ride to the cottage herself and kneel like some ministering angel at his bedside, entertained the dull hours and made them golden.

Man, to be candid, is much given to this notion of a ministering angel, which is but another phase of his vanity, however estimable it may be. Dick Escombe swore the finest resolutions during that brief captivity. He would marry Kitty, send in his papers, build a house by the river, gird it about with roses, and live ever afterward as the

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fairy prince of a nursery legend. Nothing else mattered but this desire of Kitty and of the primitive faiths. When the days passed and she did not come to him, when his brother officers began to ride over from Windsor to play cards with him and rail him upon his adventure (which they refused to believe was unconnected with the club), then, perhaps, a certain anger against circumstances did something to destroy his illusions and to sour them.

Kitty must have the news, he would say. It was impossible to believe the story had not come to her ears. And she remained as indifferent as though she had never heard the name of Richard Escombe. *La Belle Isolde* sullenly refused to stir from her shrine of sweet roses, though Sir Tristram himself lay bleeding by the road-side. Dick is to be forgiven for this romantic exaggeration of his ills. Few will be hard upon him because he believed himself to be a poorly used knight, dusty and travel-stained, and sore wounded, lying upon a lonely road beneath the very barbican of my lady's castle. It was just a mood of his depression, and when he recovered from it his cool common-sense returned also, and he determined impulsively to go back to Windsor, and there to forget these emasculating sentiments without any loss of time whatsoever.

This would have been on the evening of the tenth day after the accident. He was still a little lame; his limbs were not free from the bruises a heavy fall had inflicted upon them; but he knew that he was perfectly well able to travel, and so, before the evening was far advanced, he called loudly for Barry, and was not a little astonished to hear the good dame say that the man had been out since six o'clock and was not yet returned.

"And, saving your honor's grace, I should be better

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pleased if such a wild man never entered this house again."

"Ha! you don't like the Irish manner, my good woman?"

"There's nothing at all about him I do like, your honor, save his shoes, which I do hope will carry him from this house as soon as may be."

"He pipes, and you do not dance, my dame."

"He drinks, your honor, and my husband pays."

"A lamentable division of responsibility. Let me know directly he returns. I am going out to see if I can walk a little way down the lane."

"Your honor will never be so cruel to your poor foot! Let me lend you an arm! It's brown, but it's strong."

"No, no; Mr. Clegg would be calling me out. And what's that, woman? Faith, my man himself or nobody at all."

Barry clamored at the gate sure enough, his hair brushed awry, his eyes dancing with the news he carried, and his body quivering with the excitement of the message. Meeting his master at the cottage porch, he first indicated the importance of his errand by the oddest grimace it was possible to conceive—screwed up his mouth, lifted his hands to heaven, and finally blurted out a phrase which demanded instant attention.

"She's on the road, and the coach is empty."

"She! Who, in God's name? Not Mistress Dulcimore?"

"As I am my father's son, no other. If ye're done play-acting with your foot, follow me and see. Will ye ride or walk. 'Tis a league down the road, and the wheel still lying where it fell. Oh, ay, a fine entertainment they have ready for her, and, God be good to me, the candles already lighted and the fiddlers bidden in. Would you have her

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dance a courant with my lord? She's on the way to it now—the Hell House Club, and a hundred of the quality on her heels. But I doubt, master, that your ills are too many. You cannot lift a leg from your bed, as you told me the morn. Hist, master, ye'd never mount a horse because a wheel is lacking to my lady's coach."

Sir Dick, they say, flushed a little while he heard the words. All the story became apparent to him in an instant. The coach, Kitty's contemplated visit to the cottage, the accident which was no accident, her abduction to the most infamous house in all Europe that night—and then—and then! God! how his head reeled, how the road and the figures danced before him!

"Damn you!" he cried, savagely; "hold your tongue, man, hold your tongue!"

And then striding forward as though his limbs were of iron, he, the old Sir Richard, a soldier awakened from a bed of roses, shook the shrinking servant until his very teeth rattled in his head.

"My horse, man, this instant, or, by God, you shall never saddle horse again!"



XXVII

CAROUSEL



ARRY had said that the candles were lighted and the fiddlers already bidden in; but we shall now venture to show how very little that good fellow knew of the Society of St. Francis, and what was the real meaning of the carousal then taking place in the ruined abbey at Medmenham.

It is common knowledge that the great refectory itself had been little better than a shell when Sir Francis Dashwood hired it for his monks. Money, however, had been spent upon the place beyond all reason, and such a transformation effected that a tradition of it has endured to modern times.

Let us pass by the many sentries posted upon the main roads, both from London and Reading, and, crossing the fields near the river, gain admittance by the stone corridor to the great refectory itself, curtained and dark, and closed when last we visited the abbey.

Here we may remark much that we had not expected to discover. In the first place, the vast apartment is almost entirely in darkness, save for certain crimson lamps burning before the shrines of Bacchus and of Venus. If our eyes can become clever in the dim light, we shall decipher



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great scrolls upon the walls—scrolls in gold and green and silver, a roof open in places to the starry heavens, but chiefly the dark shapes of rounded arches in the Early English fashion, and of mighty walls; and distantly, through an aperture of the ruin, a splendid stained-glass window, behind which are many lights. From the vicinity of this there comes to us a doleful chant as of monks singing, but not the monks who wore the Cistercian habit, or any that have faith or creed at all.

Mark how silent the place is, save for this mournful chanting. Yonder, across the gardens, the old river creeps, a glassy way, toward the eternal sea. There is a glint of starlight upon its shining waters, but everywhere a message of rest and night's mysteries. Nearer, in the shadows, the figures of servants may be espied, but so far we see none of the brethren, and must wait a full ten minutes, during which the chanting continues, but from changing choirs, until at last it draws nearer, and, one of the curtains being pulled back by an unseen hand, a solemn procession enters the room and passes from shrine to shrine as gravely and with as fine a mock decorum as the world has ever heard of.

And what were these unknown men singing—what was the burden of this gradual? The records of Medmenham clearly show that they had gone to old Master Horace for their theme, and, in an apt translation, well set to a Gregorian tone, were delivering an ode to Bacchus himself—yet so wonderfully well done, so consistently acted, that even a monk from Subiacum might not have detected the fraud.

*Whither, Bacchus, lead'st thou me,
Girt with thy madness? What dens, what thickets these,*

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*Thus in wildering race I see?
What cave shall hearken to my melodies,
Tuned to tell of Cæsar's praise?
O great King,
Who the Naiads dost inspire,
And Bacchante, strong from earth huge trees to wring!
Not a lowly strain is mine.
No mere man's utterance. Oh, 'tis a venture sweet
Thee to follow, God of wine,
Making the vine branch round thy temples meet.*

To this weird refrain, slowly and solemnly, there entered the great refectory some fifty men, their robes brown and in the fashion of the Miserere at Rome, torches in their hands, their eyes meekly cast down toward the ground, their leader a chaplain who has handed his name down to astonished history, and will be remembered when no stone of Medmenham Abbey stands upon another.

Tobias Cambray. What a figure of a man! Vast, unwieldy, wearing no monk's habit as the others, but plainly garbed in a minister's gown and bands, Tobias Cambray is a figure for our imagination indeed.

Some there would be who say that a redder nose was never seen even in the purlieus of the Fleet. Whether the claim be true or false, Master Tobias boasted such a proboscis as even old Bacchus himself might have envied. Monstrous, misshapen, now threatening to take a twist to the right, now bending sharply toward the left, the contour of it verily might have mapped the moon with craters which spoke of many a bottle and nobler mounts testifying to finer spiritual flights. And what hands he had, what feet, and such a bull's neck, and the bellow of aurochs from the

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land of Bashan! Hear him now when he calls a halt, assembles the shuffling brethren about him, and cries, so that the very hills beyond Hambledon might dance to his words:

*Spirit of Joy, I invoke thee!
Spirit of Evil Destiny, I conjure thee—avaunt!*

To him the monks respond again, in deep, sonorous tones, "Avaunt!" and ere the roll of the thunder has died away we hear Tobias declaiming familiar lines from one he should have been ashamed to name in such a house—John Milton, the master, who assuredly would have made short work of these monks and their mummeries.

*The sun was sunk, and after him the star
Of Hesperus, whose office is to bring
Twilight upon the earth, short arbiter
'Twixt day and night, and now from end to end
Night's hemisphere had veiled the horizon round.*

Such was the picture as many a wit and so-called gallant beheld it upon that night of unforgotten events at Medmenham Abbey. A vast, silent apartment; brown-robed figures moving softly amid the shadows; torches and lanterns held aloft; the glimmer of the tapers before the shrines; the evil eyes that peered out from the mock masks. And for king and lord of all Tobias Cambray, who mounted the great rostrum at last, and, grouping the brethren about him, began to call the roll in a voice that would have brought no shame upon a chancellor:

"Brother Dunstan?"

"Adsum," responded Brother Dunstan, an old sot

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known to the world as Jonathan Whitwould. He bowed to the chaplain, and stepped back to make way for another.

“Brother Elphege?”

“Adsum,” cried that tipsy youth, Farningham.

The chaplain entered the name in a tremendous book, with a fine flourish of a giant’s pen, and called again:

“Brother Boniface?”

Brother Boniface, it appears, was so far gone in liquor that he answered the appeal, incoherently—and here, for the first time, the jest and ale-house humor of the company declared itself.

“Adsum,” cried the chaplain; “nay, thou hast had much, my brother,” and, turning his eyes away as though in a masterly tolerance of mere human frailties, he called on Brother Angelo—no other than our old friend Whitehead the poet.

The calling of the roll occupied some five precious minutes, perhaps. When it was done, the great book closed, and the great pen wiped, Tobias Cambray deigned to remember the purpose of the meeting, and he asked, loudly, where the corpus of William, Marquis of Repton, might be found. To which Whitehead the poet answered, that the Marquis aforesaid was unfortunate enough to be without. At which, behold Tobias rising in all his majesty.

“Without!—ay truly,” roared he, “as many a better man than he has been, and shall be in the story of immortal time. William, Marquis of Repton, is without! I ask ye, my brethren, what is he without? Clothes? Nay, he comes to us unashamed. Money? I tell you that his riches are as a shining armor to him. Great name? Who is ignorant of this man’s place in the *libra d’oro* of our country? What is it, then? Brethren, I will tell you. He is without

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the spirit, the virtue, the privilege of this most enlightened order. Humbly he stands at the gate, asking for the light. Is it your pleasure, oh gracious brothers, that we extend the hand of greeting to this our ewe lamb?"

Some one in the veiled company, unmoved by Tobias's appeal, here suggested that the reverend chaplain did not mean "ewe lamb," but "I. O. U. lamb," an irreverent gibe which the chaplain passed by with a wave of his monstrous hand.

"Let William, Marquis of Repton, be called within the bar!" he bawled. And instantly a shout of "Agreed! Agreed!" declared the impatience of the company.

At this point it is first made clear to us that the brethren of St. Francis were assembled at Medmenham Abbey that night for a somewhat particular ceremony—no other, in fact, than the reception into the fold of one who hitherto had stood in darkness without. No sooner did the voices cry "Agreed!" than Tobias smote a gong with a terrible stick, and instantly one of the curtains about the arches of the great room was drawn back by an unseen hand, and William, Marquis of Repton, the novice aforesaid, admitted to the chamber. Blindfolded, scantily clothed, supported by our old acquaintances Churchill, Ailsa, and the fat fop Cunningham, as his sponsors in debauch, the Marquis advanced slowly toward the rostrum, while the brethren lifted their torches anew and greeted him with loud cries of "*Salve, frater!*"

"Who brings this man before me?" asked Tobias, in a voice of thunder.

"I, Cecil, Marquis of Ailsa," was the response.

"What Master of the Novices stands his sponsor?"

"I, George Cunningham, so stand."

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"Who walks upon the other side?"

"None so walk."

"Who clothes the naked?"

"I so clothe him," and here Lord Ailsa put a habit over the new brother's shoulders.

"Who answers for this man's honor?"

"I answer," rejoined Cunningham.

"Who answers for this man's obedience?"

"I answer," cried Churchill.

Quick as light question and response were forthcoming from these masters of the finest mock ritual the world has ever known. And when the brief catechising of sponsors had come to an end, Tobias turned to the Marquis and continued the interrogation personally.

"Brother, what dost thou seek here?" he asked, in a voice as gentle as the cooing of a dove.

"The light," replied Repton, who had been well coached.

"The light shine upon thee," said the chaplain, raising a candle above the kneeling man's head.

They took the bandage from the kneeling brother's eyes, and he stared about him in bewilderment, the dim light confusing him, the figures of the shadows receiving him almost with a menace. For an instant even the chaplain's voice could not master his astonishment, and Tobias must repeat his question twice before it was answered.

"What dost thou desire, brother?"

"The pleasure of the eyes."

"Thine eyes being opened, what wilt thou see here?"

"The heart of the world."

"Wilt thou faithfully observe the laws of this order?"

"I will so observe them."

"Even to the gate of death, my brother?"

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"Even to the gate of death."

"Then be thou received into our midst, William, Marquis of Repton, henceforth Brother Innocens, I name thee, of the company of St. Francis."

The chaplain spread his mighty hands palm downward upon the head of the astonished man, the brethren uttered one loud and penetrating shout, "*Fay ce que voudras!*" the watchword of that historic order. Then, upon the instant, as though magic had entered in at the gate, behold the wonder of that gloomy scene. Even as the chaplain covers the new brother with his gown, even as the echo of the cry lingers upon the still waters without, so every curtain is drawn back from arch and alcove, every mock friar casts off his brown robe and stands revealed as a dashing man of fashion. No longer are the tones Gregorian or reminiscent of that choir which Cnut heard to sing sweetly in the monastery at Ely. A wild catch from the streets of the town takes its place. Girls, fantastically dressed as elves and naiads, run in to light candles, tapers flickering in their hands. The lilting music of fiddles is raised—and of a vast, gloomy refectory we have made a very theatre of light and color and life and movement.

Few have spoken plainly of the club at Medmenham; few, perchance, have done justice to some of its phases. Possibly the world of wit and art has never known so gorgeous a scene as the abbey provided for the dare-devils who ruled there during Sir Francis's reign. Music and color, feasting and dancing, the splendor of personal dress, the flower of the country's wit—all are admitted without contention.

To-night, upon the occasion of this reception of the Marquis of Repton, Medmenham had determined to sur-

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pass itself. These preliminaries were but an *hors-d'œuvre*, a very sip at the brimming goblet. The dawn—nay, it may be two dawns—would break and discover the orgy unended. Such things had been, and should be again, as many a good fellow swore when he dismounted from his horse at the gate and handed over his sword to the towering janizary. They had come to give a memorable welcome to a lagging recruit, and about him they crowded, as though some tie of consanguinity, and not a mere social bond, united them. Lords Ailsa and Churchill, the fat fop Cunningham, the drawling Whitehead, the old *roué* Whitwould, might have had the dearest wishes of their hearts fulfilled, to listen to them as they pressed upon the novice and wrung his aching hand.

“My dear Repton, a thousand joys!”

“The roll is honored, by my life!”

“No such recruit has been taken,” said the fat Cunningham, pompously—“no, not since they caught me!”

The Marquis continued to shake their hands. His eyes blinked in the magnificence of the light of a thousand candles.

“Really,” he protested, “I thought you were all the devil.”

“The majority enjoy that distinction,” said Ailsa, loftily; “the exceptions lurk in the quiet corners. But I’m glad you came in, Repton. Upon my spotless soul, Windsor would be intolerable if it were not for this place.”

“A veritable seminary,” lisped Churchill, turning to Ailsa, and deigning to ask him what was the particular programme which upon this particular evening should redeem the abbey from such an accusation.



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“By-the-way,” he asked, “what’s up to-night? What have we come out to see?”

“Everything is up. Hazard, wine, and the concomitants of wine, which, by all the fables, should be women. Here’s one of them come to speak for herself. Honor Marwood, by all that’s lucky!”

XXVIII

HONOR MARWOOD MAKES AN ANNOUNCEMENT

AND Honor Marwood truly it was, the Honor we first saw at Windsor in Richard Escombe's rooms, and meet here for the third time in this brilliant, if undesirable, assembly. Let it be said, before we hear her, that our laughing ladies, the elves and naiads who had lighted up the great candelabra, now mingled freely with the company; that light and gayety prevailed in the great apartment, where the rattle of dice could already be heard, and, more to the liking of some, the popping of corks. All, for sure, went as merry as a marriage-bell (though this was no place to speak of that) when Honor came tripping in, a miracle of silk and ribbons and patches, and immediately approached the group of admiring men as though her presence were the one thing needed to their content.

"Honor Marwood, Honor Marwood!" ran the greeting, and upon it the more particular question from Churchill, "What brings you here, Honor?"

"Oh," cries Betty Harmer, an impudent chit that walked in upon Honor's arm, "'tis not His Lordship, of course. Honor's here for an example to the others."

"To the weaker brethren," chimed in Cunningham, "which means the company generally that I see about me."

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"And, if you please, sir," cries little Ruth Wellington, another chit upon Honor's other arm—"and, if you please, sir, there's going to be an awful row."

"What! you don't mean to say His Lordship is jealous?"

"Eh, gad!" says Cunningham, "I would never love any woman who could not make me jealous."

"The green-eyed monster which doth mock the meat it feeds upon," drawled the poet Whitehead.

"Come, come," says Honor, "have done with your nonsense, gentlemen. Sure, isn't it this dear man that you have taken from his home to spoil in this nasty place. Marquis, don't listen to them now."

"But the deaf have to pay their footing as well as those who can hear," exclaimed Betty, and at this, the three giggling mischievously, little Ruth ran up to Repton and gave him a smacking kiss.

"There's one debt paid in full," cried she, "and that's how it's done, Marquis!"

"By my sacred soul," cried he, his usual phlegm somewhat relieved, "you'd make me a very profligate!"

"Lip service, Marquis," from Ailsa, who turned drolly to Ruth, and demanded to know how much the amount of his account might be.

"Don't I owe anything?" he asked her, and she, boxing him on the ear soundly, said that was the amount of it.

Lord Churchill made some remark about the advantage of having an audience, and then, touching Honor upon the arm, he asked news of Harborne.

"Where's your poodle, Honor—where's the most dis-honorable Brother Anthony?"

"My Lord Harborne? What do I know of him? He's at St. James's to be married."

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"Marriage," says Whitehead, dreamily—"how long since I have uttered that word!—I'll make a note of it."

"His Lordship's habit," interposed little Ruth; "but he always leaves the papers in the chaise."

"At least it is a pretty subject, one to walk around, so to speak—I would write even upon these fair walls, in letters of gold, my tribute to marriage. Considered philosophically, it is ideal."

"But, upon a nearer view, most curiously exclusive," says Cunningham.

"Hush, hush, gentlemen!" cried Honor, suddenly; "don't you know that His Lordship has promised to marry me?"

They greeted the statement uproariously. Even the fat Cunningham shook with laughter.

"When's it coming off, Honor?"

"On the thirty-first day of February next year, sir. Now, there's the bottle coming, so you must all drink my health, gentlemen."

She clapped her hands, looking toward the door upon which all eyes were now turned. Many new arrivals were now crowding into the refectory, fops and gallants, old men and young, statesmen, lawyers, soldiers, women veiled and women unveiled. A scraping of fiddlers could be heard, and a ceaseless banter of laughter; but the surpassing interest of the moment lay in the appearance of a new procession, moving in honor of the new brother, and thoroughly in accord with the finest traditions of Medmenham.

They had assembled the Bacchantes near the door, and hereabouts four nymphs, by no means overdressed, as my Lord Ailsa remarked to the fat Cunningham, were to carry the poles of the tasselled and gilded canopy, uplifted above a splendid tankard, so huge, so formidable that Hercules

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himself might have shrunk from it. Trumpeters heralded the approach of the Titan's draught; dancing-girls, spangled and caparisoned in the Egyptian and Spanish fashion, gamboled about it, clashing the cymbals and drumming upon tambourines. There was a master cellarer with a key that would have fitted the lock of Goliath's cellar; other musicians, light-toed and hilarious, bearers of banners blazoned with odd devices; a tag-rag and bobtail of dicers, wagers, and women helpers to whip in the whole and make the fuller audience. This now grouped about the rostrum while Master Tobias rapped the tables for silence.

"Brethren," cried he, "according to our unchanging custom, let the health of our new brother be drunk in wine!"

They hailed him with cheers. The Bacchantes knelt before the throne. This wonder of a chaplain lifted the tankard with both hands—a heavy task, straining even those mighty thews and sinews.

"Brethren," he roared, "I hear the battle-cry! On, dogs of war! Return with the trophies of the slain. If I fail, perish my name. Victorious, salute me. Our new brother!"

He threw his head back, stiffened his hips against the weight of silver, and deliberately began to drain the bowl. Men watched him, mouths agape with offers of a wager.

"A pony he doesn't finish it."

"Done with you."

Such were the comments. The women gasped for very breath at the spectacle. Will you, won't you, down goes the liquor drop by drop. The monstrous draught is no match for this man of Medmenham. And behold!—it is



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vanished, gone, lost forever in the story of time. The very
welkin rings with the shout that greets the deed.

“Curse him,” says my Lord Ailsa, who has lost fifty,
“he’s done it.”

But Tobias, the chaplain, merely remarked:
“Ah, gentlemen, you should see me when I’m thirsty!”

XXIX

THE CAROUSAL IS CONTINUED



OBIAS descended proudly from the rostrum, and at that very moment the founder of the Hell Fire Club, Sir Francis Dashwood, entered the room with Lord Harborne upon his arm. The latter appeared to have been in high fettle. His hatchet face was wreathed with smiles. He had been drinking heavily, but carried his burden with grace. To such of the women as he knew he deigned a patrician's nod. The men he slapped affectionately upon the back as one who had some right to patronize them. For was not this a democracy wherein, as the poet Whitehead once put it gracefully, liquor was the king and every man better than his neighbor?

Needless to say that the chaplain of Medmenham, sycophant and tuft-hunter ever, was very civil to my lords, though he maintained the traditions in a fashion.

“Peace unto you—and you, my worthy Diocletian. Are ye not late, my brethren?”

“Late!” says my lord; “does peace, then, count the clock, reverence?”

“Nay, brother, the clock counts itself, and, failing in the calculation, begins once more. Even so, in humble imitation, let the man who has left off know more of his beginnings.”

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"Meaning," cried Sir Francis, "that any time is no time, and this time the best time! What's up, chaplain?"

Tobias had expected to be asked this question, and he rejoined, with great gusto:

"Supper is up, my brother—and after that such light recreation as your principles will approve."

"My principles—eh, gad! the word has a pleasant ring. Does a man come here, then, because of principles, reverence?"

"Nay, brother, he comes at the call of interest, which, being a lesser thing than principle, I would name a woman. Shall I tell you fraternally of the ladies from Covent Garden? Friend, Roman, countryman, lend me your eyes. I have much to show you, brother."

"I'll doubt it not at all," said Sir Francis, and, linking arms with him, he disappeared at once in the throng.

My Lord Harborne, however, had already espied Honor Marwood, and he crossed over to her side, very nettled, as any one could see.

"I told you not to come here to-night," said he, breaking in upon it without a word of preface.

Honor did not care a fig for my lord in this place, and told him as much very plainly.

"So here I am," says she.

"You do not intend to obey me, then?"

"To love, honor, and obey, sweet lord. Sure, no man loves a woman who does what he tells her. That's what I was saying to Mr. Cockraine this very night."

"Cockraine—you have seen Cockraine?"

She looked at him very shrewdly.

"On Marlow Heath, as I rode in from London, sweet lord. Ah, you'd better have made me your confidante."

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"Confidant!" cried Harborne, "damn you, what do you mean by that?" For my lord's sweetness had all gone at the word, and he looked as though he would have struck the woman.

"Oh," says she, playing with him as a kitten with a bulldog, "you ask me what I mean, but that's just what I was waiting for Your Lordship to tell me."

"Then, my very dearest," said Harborne, much mollified, "continue to reflect upon the blessings of ignorance."

"As the other lady will be doing presently."

Again the smile left the man's face.

"A fable!" cried he.

"Of the wolf and the lamb, sweet lord," says Honor.

He liked the compliment, and chuckled the hussy pleasantly under the chin.

The scene within the room was now at its zenith. Everywhere men, and women, too, had settled down to their pleasures. Those who would take a fling at the dice found twenty tables prepared for them. Girls ogled their admirers and led them out through the corridors, festooned with flowers, toward the sleeping river. The gardens were aglow with light; perspiring fiddlers raced through lilting tunes as though this were the shortest road to the bottle. On the water itself they had moored quaint craft, shaped like the gondolas from Venice, or lateen-sailed as the ships of the Levant. These carried excited passengers, the girls flaunting it in bravado, the men catching them in their arms and kissing them when they could. As for old Tobias, he was everywhere—carrying no blessing, we may suppose, but a stentorian encouragement to the virtues of the places—here bawling for a drink, there a sally to the women. Of all the company my Lord Harborne alone forbore to lend

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his mind to the pageant or to be interested by it. As he had often said, the world did not understand him. It is to be questioned whether he understood himself.

Now, my lord was roving to and fro amid the company, here flinging a guinea upon a green cloth, there exchanging drolleries with a wench, when Tobias returned to his rostrum and began to speak of more intimate delights. Unblushing in his effrontery, but quite unmoved by the liquor he had drunk, he rapped the desk many times for order, and had the voice of a thunder-cloud when at last he obtained a hearing.

“Gentlemen!” he cried—“gentlemen, the tables are set, the wine is poured. Aphrodite rises from the deep in her coral robes. With shawms and lyre let the revels begin. Behold, I come to you with great news. Brethren, the ladies from Covent Garden are with us.”

A fine pronouncement, truly, and yet one which moved the company but little. Men settled to play care nothing for the dance. Others, holding Venus by the palm, would not bestow twopence upon Phyllis about to caper on the boards. In truth, the roar of the talk waxed higher after Tobias had spoken; the voice of the gamester was more defiant, when, without any warning, the great bell of the abbey, high above them in the Norman tower, clanged three solemn strokes, and instantly, as though a hand of warning had touched each and all upon the shoulder, such a silence fell that a man might have counted the beatings of his heart.

Be sure, old Tobias was sober enough by now. Had not the King, old Soldier George, at Windsor, sworn that he would exterminate this plague-spot some day, root and branch, hang the players and burn their tables, flog the

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wenches and ride their masters on a hurdle—and, “Lord,” says Tobias to himself, “if this should be the night!”

Never was the great bell of the abbey rung except in warning. No wonder that men ceased to play and women tittered for very excitement of the moment.

“Gentlemen,” cried Tobias, struggling painfully to the rostrum, “that is plainly an alarm.”

No one answered him; all heard the sound of footsteps in the corridor, and waited with heightened color and new impatience. When that low fellow Cockraine entered the room at last, a deep sigh of satisfaction greeted him. For Cockraine must have the news—nay, he was all agog to tell them.

“Your reverence—gentlemen—a lady whose coach has been overtaken by a misfortune, almost at our door, seeks our hospitality until the mischance may be mended.”

He looked about him, an odd smile on his ugly face, and a particular leer for my Lord Harborne, who stood over against the chimney, and had the air of being the most astonished man in all that astonished company. As for the canaille all about, it would be difficult to find a word for that. Every note in the gamut of exclamatory surprise was sounded when Cockraine had finished. Women roared aloud in horrid laughter, the dancers flung their skirts aside and cut new capers, a trumpeter blew a shrill and mocking blast—above all, the face of Tobias, the chaplain, waxed so red in honest laughter that men feared an apoplexy for him.

“What!” bawled he to Cockraine, “a lady—did she give her name?”

“That’s not for me to ask,” said the man. “She believes this to be the house of the Vicar of Medmenham. I did not contradict her.”

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A resounding peal of laughter greeted the new confession. Men squirmed in their chairs; excited wenches kissed their partners on the lips for very joy of it.

"I have been called many names," says Tobias, with fine gravity, "but never yet did they call me the Vicar of Medmenham. My brethren, what say ye to all this?"

Lord Harborne answered him, and so quickly that Tobias started when he heard him.

"You must have her in," says my lord; "the rules provide for it. You must have her in, chaplain."

"Ay, ay!" cried fifty voices; "you cannot shut the doors of Medmenham on a lady."

Tobias wagged his great head, and posed as one who was not yet certain of the jurisprudence of the matter. He had the great book closed before him, and he began to turn the leaves of it slowly.

"It is in the rules, as ye say," he admitted, at last. "No woman shall be refused admittance to the club under any circumstances whatsoever. Brethren, though it hurt our consciences to do so, we must admit the lady. Brother Arthur, be thou our ambassador. Let the habits be resumed. Hussies, begone! Gentlemen, remember the prudent counsels which have so often guided us, I beseech you."

He waved his arm theatrically, and the dancing-girls and others ran laughing from the place to the gardens. The brethren, well understanding that this was no accident, and already detecting my lord's finger in the pie, hastily donned their brown habits, and consented momentarily to take part in so diverting a play. Some of the many lights were extinguished, an expectant hush fell upon the company, and prevailed until Kitty Dulcimore's voice was heard in the

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corridor and the chaplain himself strode forward to greet her.

Now, Kitty was dressed in a pretty gown of blue and silver, and had a dark-blue velvet cloak covering her from shoulder to ankle. Her hat was immense and feathered, such a great round hat as the pictures of Romney and Sir Joshua have made known to us; and she wore, moreover, a great brooch of aquamarines and diamonds, which Aunt Elizabeth recently pressed upon her acceptance with tears and more anecdotes of good Queen Anne.

A thousand miles from suspicion, believing that the accident to her coach had been a very ordinary affair, and much surprised to find herself among old friends—for she had met Captains Beddoe and Rupert at the very door of the club—she walked into the refectory with no more concern than she would have entered her own parlor at Sherbourn, and, standing there amazed, she did not even then understand.

“Lady,” says Tobias, bending his back heroically and waving his great mortar-board so wildly that men stepped back in affright—“lady, welcome to Medmenham.”

She gazed at him dumfounded. The horrid cowls about her, the mocking eyes which laughed, but half concealed, the lights, the tables, the drink—and this monster of a man bowing to her as some clown at a circus! Good God! what must she think now?

“To Medmenham!” cried she; “but, Captain Beddoe, you told me—”

“That this was the vicar’s house? My dear lady, the fiction was not mine. Upon my life, eh, Rupert?”

“Upon your life, it wasn’t,” says Rupert, quickly, and the pair of them laughing together, the chaplain spoke again.

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"It shall be any house you choose to name it while you are here, lady. Say not that Tobias Cambray knows his duties so ill. Vicar of Medmenham or Pope of Rome, 'tis one and the same thing to him. We are but your slaves—command us when you will."

She drew back a little, as though his very touch were an affront. Speaking in rapid tones, becoming excited and fearful, and feeling that her courage was not equal to this, Kitty tried to tell them how she had come to the place.

"We lost a wheel of the coach, and the men are gone down to the village to make it good. I count it most fortunate that Captain Beddoe should have ridden by—and Captain Rupert, surely, would not be far off. I thought that I was among friends, and cannot be mistaken. Is not this, sir, the club at Medmenham of which Lord Harborne has spoken to me?"

"Lady, as you say, the club at Medmenham."

"And these—these gentlemen—"

She shuddered a little, for the cowls were all grouped together, and the eyes that blazed upon her through jagged slits gave poor promise of the friendship she relied upon.

"They hide their virtues from the world, lady, such is their modesty. *Parum parva decent.* They will be first to tell you what we owe to our ancient tradition of hospitality. Even now, mistress, I will present them to you—Brother Elphege, Brother Boniface, Brother Angelo, Brother Jerome. They bring lilies in their hand, lady—which is a metaphor, speaking of those blameless lives they would lead in this house."

He waved his hand magniloquently, and one by one the brethren did obeisance to their guest. Not a man in the room by this time who did not understand the trick or tell

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himself that Harborne had lured Kitty Dulcimore to the place that he might profit by her adventure.

If any finer sentiment stirred in any heart it was not spoken. The laws of Medmenham Abbey were better obeyed than any decree of King or Parliament. It was death to stand between a brother and his jest—you can read the very rule in the old code that has come down to us—and who would spill his blood for a country girl, caught in a net by a villain, and there affording the brotherhood a pretty hour's amusement? Not the monks of St. Francis, be sure of it! Not Churchill, or Ailsa, or Whitwould, or the fat fop Cunningham. Let my lord see to it, for this was his affair; and so they bowed and smirked before Kitty, and, presently, one, bolder than the others, reminded the chaplain of the ancient custom—that any lady who entered the refectory at Medmenham must take the oath before she went forth again.

"I need no obedience," says Kitty, prettily; "indeed, sir, I must now be on my way again."

And then from the cowled group in the shadows came the voice:

"She cannot leave until she is one of us."

An ominous utterance—one that many voices seconded. Hear them altogether crying, "Agreed! agreed!" and then the appeal to Tobias, and then the appeal to the law.

"The oath—she must take the oath, Tobias," and again the cry, "Agreed!"

Tobias pretended to be greatly shocked by this, but he was all aflame with it, none the less, and as grateful as any man could be for this new opportunity of distinguishing himself.

"Indeed, it is so, mistress," he said, while he affected such

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an air of distress that tears alone were wanting for its complement—"indeed, it is so. Our pious founders have decreed that all who enter this room during the hour of the office shall take the oath to our order. Confer this priceless boon upon us, and then you may go in peace."

And what could Kitty Dulcimore say to that? Consider her position. She had no friend in the room. Those about her practised toward women a code which Chesterfield and the age had glorified. The vilest rakes that ever skulked in the dark places of a city leered and fawned about her. The scene was strange and frightful to a point beyond all power of modern understanding. She believed that her coach would shortly be brought to the door and her servants come for her—but meanwhile what should she say to these men, how bear herself toward them? Discretion and courage alike taught her to temporize. She would enter into the spirit of the jest to the uttermost of her power. But chiefly she, the Kitty whom they had toasted of old time, would show them that she was not afraid.

"Sir," she said, standing up before them as Kitty Dulcimore knew how, "who am I to offend your pious founders? Please tell me what to do and I will try to please you."

A great shout of "Hear! hear!" greeted this unexpected assent. One villain, snatching a discarded habit from a chair, flung it wide open, and prepared to put it about her shoulders. The chaplain took the candle from his desk and raised it aloft.

"Sister," he said, answering the question she had put to him, "the custom is as old as the club. We thank you for your acquiescence. No one who enters this house as you have entered it leaves it until the oath is taken. You must become one of us."

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“One of you—oh, sir, but which one?”

They liked her wit and applauded it. When she asked them if she must put the habit on, and was told that it was necessary, “being the habit of a gracious order,” she asked why the “gracious order” chose to hide its face from the world. And this gave Tobias his second opportunity.

“The light of your presence, mistress. Come, answer me according to the book—”

“Is it a good book?” inquired Kitty again, with a light laugh that almost spoke contempt.

“It is a very good book—the rules of our order.”

“What great, big, noble rules they must be! And I must put my little hand upon it. Sir, 'tis never formidable enough to break your rules?”

“Nay, mistress, but it touches them with fingers of gold. Be pleased to humor us, and out of your good-will to take the oath we shall require of you.”

“An oath, sir? Since when has woman been asked to swear an oath?”

“Since man knew that she keeps no oath. You will be the honorable exception. Nay, you will understand the imprudence, the danger, of repeating anything you have heard here to-night. Swear this to us, and then shall you depart in peace.”

The man had put menace into his tone, and all sense of comedy was lost upon that instant. Clever and quick, Kitty realized that something more than jest lay behind this requirement. They threatened her and would compel her to swear, while she, who had never lacked obstinacy since she was old enough to possess any character at all, was just as determined not to be so trapped.

“Sir,” she said, “I am a stranger, but I shall not believe

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evil of you. I know nothing of the meaning of your oath, and am not willing to degrade myself by swearing it. In so far as I may safeguard your confidence honorably, I will do so. More than that is impossible."

She gazed about her, facing them with amazing courage, and in no way afraid. Tobias, himself not quite sure of his ground, and having no instructions to make a scene, affected to treat her refusal as a joke. In truth, he retreated so nimbly that even the brethren laughed aloud.

"*Nolent ubi velis,*" cried he—quoting from Terence—"even as the Master has written so shall it be. Let the brethren speak for you, lady. Let one of them answer in your name."

Now, for the first time, my lord appears; he has been skulking in the shadows hitherto, and watching the scene as a hawk may watch a quarrel among the sparrows. But the moment had arrived for his intervention, and, stepping boldly into the arena, he cried:

"I answer in the lady's name!"

XXX

THE BEGINNING OF THE TRAGEDY

**N**OW, no sooner had my lord spoken and laid his hand solemnly upon the book than a great shout went up from the assembled brethren, and in a twinkling their robes were cast aside again, and all the riot and debauch resumed.

From every quarter, through the door and apertures, leaping gayly through the curtained arches, came the elves and sprites and dancing-girls. Fiddlers and trumpeters, wonderfully refreshed, thrashed and blew their instruments with a finer vigor; lackeys ran to and fro with drink; the dicers hurried to their tables, the more profligate to their amours. And then, and not until then, Kitty knew and understood why Lord Harborne had brought her to this house, and what was the nature of the trap he had set for her.

Perchance even the most fertile imagination will hardly understand her position as circumstances had made it, and would report upon it when the affair was over.

Those were not the days when common-sense readily obtained a hearing. Vain to say that Kitty had but to tell her own story, to relate the misadventure which carried her to the abbey, and to demand the consideration of all

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right-thinking people. Reputations were blown about as straws when George II. was King. Honor drew the most ridiculous bills upon mankind, and they were duly discharged.

Kitty knew as well as any man in the great refectory that this trick would confound her utterly in the world without, and hold her up to the shame and derision of the town. She, to be sure, understood in a moment why Harborne had been driven to it, and what his ultimate purpose must be. And we shall blame her not at all if a sense of utter helplessness and defeat overwhelmed her for the time being, and left her almost blind to the scenes about her, pale and trembling, and so ashamed that even death itself would have been welcome.

And what of my lord meanwhile? Truly, there was a sardonic grin upon his ugly face, though we confess he still safeguarded the word and manner of a gentleman, and appeared to be as solicitous for Kitty's welfare as though she had been his own daughter.

"This," says he, "is truly an unfortunate meeting, Miss Kitty."

"Since you are present, my lord, misfortune is the word I would employ."

"And yet others would be more grateful. Shall we say at once that I am responsible for every coach upon the road?"

"If gratitude be demanded because you are about to quit the house, my lord, then—"

"Come, come," says he, "and what would happen to Kitty Dulcimore in such a house as this if those who have her honor at heart go calling for their own horses?"

"She will find others more acceptable, even among the meanest—and saying that honor at the heart is rarely

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also in the head, will more easily ride to salvation, my lord."

He waved it off, his hand glittering with diamonds and his manner not a little troubled.

"Consider this," says he: "my word is law in this place. There is not a man among them all who will speak of to-night's affair until I give him leave. And, mark you, I do not come with threats. Good God, Kitty, why should I be forbidden to love you? Why have you forbidden me to love you from the first? Am I different from other men? Is sentiment to be denied to me because I was born to what I am? Was there a day in your father's house at Sherbourn when I did not show my affection for you, as a man who loves must do? Oh no, no; don't speak of Brighton—don't tell me what a man may do when a woman drives him, and love for her is hot in his heart. I am no different from other men, but it is my misfortune to be misunderstood. By God, Kitty, if you will give me the right, it is not of a friend I shall speak in this house to-night, but of my wife. Now, think of that before you answer me. No man can pay a woman a greater compliment than to ask her to be his wife. Here and now I do so, and would be judged only by that."

He bent over her until his burning lips almost touched the roses upon her cheeks. And who shall presume to say that my lord was altogether dishonest? Perhaps he would have made her his wife had Kitty played her cards properly. The oldest *roués*, long accustomed to consent, may desire, not the possession of a woman, but a victory over her obstinacy.

Harborne was moved by Kitty's beauty and spirit as he had not been moved in all his disreputable life. One word of consent from her might have shattered the ideal and left

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him the mere schemer, willing to summon a parson from the Fleet, but not from any church with its doctrine of vows eternal. So much Kitty understood—her woman's instinct had taught it to her from the first. She knew that honor and my lord never would walk far hand in hand; and had it been otherwise, she would never have listened to him until the end of time, and for the best of reasons—she loved another.

"Oh, my dear lord," says she, "you choose a strange hour to speak of such things."

"Hours pass very quickly at Medmenham—and when they have passed they may never be recalled."

"Wooing those whom men love with a menace, and bartering time for their honor."

"Give me the right, and I will take you from this place now. It is very necessary that you should decide quickly. Your ears will tell you that."

"Yes, yes—if I must listen—"

"There is no alternative, my dear child."

My lord referred to a brawl which even then engaged the attention of the company. The most part of the men, understanding that Kitty Dulcimore and Harborne had an affair of their own to decide, had been paying them scant attention; but now, all unexpectedly, the old fop Whitewould began to quarrel with the fellow Musgrove over some scarlet-cheeked Aphrodite in the corner; and immediately there arose such a babel that the King's Dragoons themselves might have ridden in from Windsor.

"Peace, peace!" roared Tobias, his figure huge and prominent above the other brawlers. "What is this?"

"I brought the girl here!" cries Musgrove, standing defiantly with his back to the wall.

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"That's a lie!" says Whitwould; "it was my introduction."

"Silence, I say!" roared the chaplain.

He pushed in among them, while the men about him bawled: "The rule! the rule!" All the wenches in the place were a-tip toe now. Men had risen from the play and thrown the cards aside. A ceaseless clatter of voices almost drowned the shuffle of strife; but presently Tobias's dominant thunder prevailed above the hubbub, and he read the rule aloud.

"The rule is No. 15, page 2—a rule, be it known to you all, made by our brother Wilkes in the first week of the club's initiation. Here are our brother's words: 'For the safeguarding of our honor, it shall be decreed that any brother who draws sword upon another in the name of woman, shall by his own hand pay the forfeit of his life before twenty-four hours have passed.'"

Roars of laughter greeted this announcement, as it ever had done in the story of Medmenham Abbey and the brotherhood. Wise John Wilkes foresaw that nothing but a drastic penalty, scrupulously exacted, could save such a place from the wildest orgies of bloodshed and quarrel—and so he drew this rule, which we have heard of before, for which a young lad died upon Harborne's threat, and on account of which King George had sworn to leave no stone of Medmenham standing upon another. None the less, the company heard the words with levity, and almost immediately the old fop Whitwould retired and left his rival in possession.

"Take her, my brother," says he, indicating the wench who had brought them to blows—"I intend to live."

This, then, was the scene which distracted Kitty at the

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moment of my lord's avowal; this the interlude which brought resolution back to her.

It may be that she herself hardly knew what she did at such a moment. The vileness of all that she heard and saw—the glitter of the gauds, the silk, the ruffles, the velvet, the clanking of glasses, the shouts of the players—but more than all these, the familiar looks, the open contempt expressed for her by the sluts in whose company she had fallen. Oh, be sure, that this was such an ordeal as woman has but rarely faced and never might face with resolution. Nor may we express surprise when we hear that, driven to the last point, she turned boldly from my lord and would have fled from the room but for a barrier of the very women themselves, a net cast suddenly about her, and upon that such horrid laughter, such an outcry of mockery that she reeled back almost fainting and moved even such a well-schooled rake as Harborne to some compassion.

"I will take you home," he said, quickly. "You shall be put to no conditions, Kitty, if you will hold me guiltless of this—"

"My lord," says she, pressing white hands to her pretty forehead, "as Heaven is my witness, I will hold you guilty to my life's end."

He cowered and drew back from her. Every one in the room read the words as a menace, and many there began to murmur. Tobias himself, foreseeing graver perils, mounted to his rostrum and rang the bell three times, bringing three white-robed cooks to the room and cleverly diverting attention from the incident. As for the chefs, they played a part with the others, bowing before the rostrum and announcing the good news.

"My lords and gentlemen," says the first.

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"It is our great gracious privilege," added the second.
"To announce to your worship."

And then the trio together, in a terrible tone:
"That supper is served."

They withdrew, still bowing. The company received the announcement with great applause. Tables of play were broken up, the procession of the Bacchantes was formed again, trumpets were blown, the cymbals beaten, and then, for a finer effect, the great crimson curtain above the central arch was thrown back and a space cleared before it.

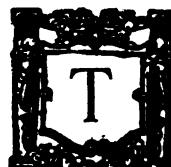
"Gentlemen!" roars the chaplain.

But he said no more. There, standing in the very aperture of the arch, his hand upon his sword, was Sir Richard Escombe, and, seeing him, every man in that company knew that the crisis in the story of the Hell Fire Club had come, and that many must answer before the new day was old.



XXXI

THE TRAGEDY IS PLAYED



THERE had been but one loud cry at his coming, and that from a woman's throat. Mad with shame and anger, believing herself to be utterly ruined by a villain's ruse, it is not very difficult to understand what Kitty Dulcimore felt when she beheld her lover come as an avenger to that dreadful place. And what hand would dare to keep her from him now? Oh, be sure she was sobbing at his feet before a man might have counted two, caught in his strong arm, comforted by his whispered word. And holding her thus, her hands clasped in his, such a look upon his face as even his enemies had rarely seen there, he called for other help.

"If there be any friend of mine in this company," he said, speaking for the first time, "I will thank him to take Miss Dulcimore to her coach."

Repton stepped forth—Repton the novice, but just made of the elect, and no witness of the infamies. He had been abroad in the gardens by the river when they brought Kitty to the abbey, and had not returned to the refectory until men spoke of supper.

"I will take her, Sir Richard," says he, and the murmur of astonishment and rage did not daunt that phlegmatic individual at all.

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Escombe pressed his hand, and, whispering again to Kitty, he bade her go with the Marquis.

"For both our sakes," said he, "'tis in this house I must remain."

"Dick—Dick—but you will be alone."

"Among cowards. Go, for God's sake—you would make it difficult for me. And, Kitty, show them your courage. Let it be the old Kitty—"

He could say no more, for the murmur of words threatened already to break into a storm which might overwhelm them both. And Kitty, though her heart was breaking, understood that Dick must answer for her, that he must be her avenger though his life paid forfeit. How could it be otherwise? No voice of angels could command Richard Escombe in such a mood as that.

He had taken the burden up, and would never lay it down until that which men call honor had answered in his name. So much Kitty's cleverness perceived, when, with one last appealing glance at the marble of his face, one whispered word of love, she turned to the Marquis and permitted him to lead her from the room. As a child she had come in, as a queen she went out from among them. And the man who had picked up the glove remained to do battle for it—one alone in a house of infamy prepared to pay the price to the uttermost farthing.

The scene was grim enough, as some who have taken part in it do not hide from us.

A great circle of men, hussies, masqueraders, mock monks, sharpers, *roués*, villains—these all grouped about one man who had come there to accuse them.

To the right of the room our friend Harborne, standing uneasily, his eyes searching Escombe's face, a sword, got

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during the interval, already in his hand. He knew well what the issue must be. Rule made by John Wilkes or rule not so made, the sword alone could arbitrate to-night. And yet my lord continued to ask himself if the rules of Medmenham might not shield him after all. A shadow of death seemed to hover about him; he knew—for man is rarely ignorant at such a time—that this was the momentous hour. He had no faith of the morrow, boast of it as he might.

Of the others, Tobias, the chaplain, was the most excited, and showed himself the least self-possessed in that stirring crisis. Here, there, and back again, raising his monstrous hands, crying, “Gentlemen, gentlemen!” Tobias was thinking little of that assembled company, but much of what the King would say if this night’s work came to his ears.

Good God! What a thing to be told abroad! And did not he, Tobias, clerk in holy orders—did not he rely upon the abbey not only for board and lodging but for such paltry washing as he did? No wonder that he hustled about; no surprise to us that he cried “Gentlemen!” until the very walls seemed to echo the words ironically. And his final achievement remained stupendous, for what must he do but go up to Sir Richard, and, bowing low, commit a gauderie for which none ever forgave him.

“Sir Richard Escombe,” says he, “you are welcome to Medmenham.”

Dick waved him aside with a gesture of contempt, and crying, “Damnably welcome, it appears,” he began to inspect the faces narrowly, looking into each as though it must be impressed upon a memory that would be tenacious beyond all belief.

“Most damnably welcome, it appears.”

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"Brother, you have been five years as a sheep that is lost to the fold. We loaded you with gifts, and you departed from us. Many come and go in five years, brother. Be sure if we hesitate to rejoice it is that we may know the reasons which kept you from our midst."

So Tobias babbled on. Supper, the ritual, the dance, the play—all these had given place to the excitement of the scene. Every man knew that Richard Escombe would meet Harborne face to face before many seconds passed. This prelude, this delay, but whetted their appetites. They listened to Sir Richard as to one who spoke the prologue of a tragedy.

"Curious as ever, reverence. And my old friends all about me as of yore."

And then looking again searchingly into the nearest faces, he went on:

"Is not that Churchill, flying with the same old hawks; ay, as quick on the wings as ever, I'll be bound—and my fat friend Cunningham; he's been after the bottle ever since I can remember, and, by my soul, the bottle's before him still."

"Sir Richard Escombe!" cried Cunningham, in a voice that might have been thunder heard afar—

"Mr. Cunningham."

"You—you—jest, Sir Richard."

The craven in the man withdrew, and his invective took a crutch and limped away. Ailsa was the next to be charged, but he heard it with a poor, wan smile, as who should say, "I'm not the man for you."

"'Tis jesting I have been all my life," Dick ran on, "like my friend Ailsa here. Faith, he ran away from the sea-captain's wife and took all the ladies' hearts in the baggage-

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cart with him. My lord, I'm rejoiced to see you again. There are many who are slow upon their legs, but in the matter of running—ay, let me shake hands with one who would put the Oxford boys to shame."

Ailsa turned away with an oath. Many began to murmur against the license, but none dared to speak of it openly. When Harborne's turn came silence fell again, and you could hear the fall of a velvet shoe as a great sound in the room.

"My lord," says Escombe, not beating about the bush, but coming to it immediately, "have ye written your account of this night's work for the papers?"

"Sir," asks my lord, "since when did I become a gentleman of Grub Street?"

Dick waved it off with an impatient gesture.

"There's other gentlemen among ye," he said, addressing the menace to the company—"others among ye who, I doubt not, will be readier with their pens. You were better employed upon the couplet or villanelle, my lord. But what I would say to you and to all here present is this: that if there's a man who breathes a word of this story outside these walls I'll kill him, so help me Heaven."

He laid his sword hand upon his sword again with a light gesture and waited unflinchingly for their response. Cowed by him at the first, perhaps some memory of their numbers now came to the aid of the cravens, and from a safe place at the rear of the ringed company a ruffian cried that a spy had come in. Then Dick turned upon them with a very roar of temper.

"Spy from you, nighthawks and feathered rats—spy from you—ay, a word I've heard before—but not twice from the same lips, and if the man who uttered the word—"

Sir Richard Escombe

They cringed before him, forgetting even to murmur, and now Tobias came forward again, blundering as ever and grotesque in his humiliation.

“Gentlemen, gentlemen,” says he, “I doubt not that Sir Richard Escombe will give proper satisfaction to the club for what has passed. A man of honor, as I am, a soldier, an Irishman—”

Dick silenced him ferociously.

“Ye hypocrite and sorry liar, hold your tongue, I say. What I owe I will repay, even to such as these—men banished from every honest house, men whose stories they tell to the dark but never to the sun. Such claim the penalty, and I will pay it, every jot and tittle, when you will, at dawn or dusk, in the city or the fields. Ye shall have it at your choice, sots and drunkards, traducers of women. Ye shall have it when ye will; and you, my lord, you who sent me to Jordans for this, you shall have it now.”

He held up a child’s glove, upon which my lord’s eyes fell as though upon a thing accursed. Anger had mastered Richard Escombe utterly by this time and the chain of a subtler reason snapped. Knowing well what the price of his intervention must be, understanding the penalty they might claim of him, he nursed but a single purpose—to be avenged upon my lord, and that swiftly. And so he gave rein to passion, and, heeding nothing but the goal of his vengeance, he slapped Harborne heavily upon the face and instantly drew his sword.

A scene of indescribable confusion followed upon the challenge. Women shrieked and fled from the place; some went dancing and capering wildly to the gardens; man elbowed man that he might be nearer to the ring; glasses were crashed and broken, tables overturned, curtains torn

Sir Richard Escombe

from arches. And loud above every other cry was that dolorous note of those who remembered the rule and demanded that the penalty be paid.

As for my lord, he also had drawn his sword. White and pale and looking very old in that hour, he understood perhaps that his life had been lived, that the sun of his day had risen for the last time. This may or may not have been. Fatality does not find willing servants even among cowards, and there had been hours in Lord Harborne's life when he had proved himself no coward. We read that he faced Sir Richard immediately, showing neither nimbleness in excuse nor any desire to postpone an issue unavoidable. The child's glove lay upon the floor as his enemy's mascot. He did not dare to look at that.

"Gentlemen," he cried, very solemnly, "you are the witnesses of this and will bear testimony."

They answered him with shouts, some inciting him to fight, others to hold back. Tobias, the chaplain, his hands spread abroad like a fan, images of King George's Dragoons dancing before his maddened eyes, could but roar:

"Back! Back! You cannot fight! You know the rule!"

To which Escombe answered: "Be damned to your rule! Let my lord speak of it."

"Gentlemen," says Lord Harborne, "please to remember that I am not the aggressor. Let the club see to it. Whatever may happen to me, I claim the penalty as the rule dictates."

"And I," said Sir Richard, "will pay it before the sun shall set again."

He engaged almost immediately, and for many minutes nothing but the clash of swords could be heard in the room. Those who were nearest to the ring declared that my lord fought with great address, but as a losing man, from the

Sir Richard Escombe

outset. Clever as his touch, neat and quick his steps despite his years, he had that air of submission which is the sure premonition of defeat. And if he saw sympathetic faces all about him, comrades of the glittering hours, companions of the table and the road, he read also in their eyes a confession of indifference which should have been no surprise to him. Many of these he had loaded with gifts; some he had saved from prison and from exile. To-morrow they would seek a new patron, and curse the hour which put them to such inconvenience. My lord was well aware of it. He doubted if he had a friend in all the house.

And Richard Escombe, what of him? Socially ostracized for three years at this man's bidding, his pride stinging him, the knowledge that he had won all and lost all in one brief hour—were these thoughts dominant in his mind, or had he opened it to others? God alone knows that. He knew now that Kitty loved him. He knew that the hours of folly and doubt were gone by forever, but would that knowledge help him?

To-morrow, before the sun should set, he must answer in honor to the ribald crew which now surrounded him. He had heard Kitty's voice for the last time, but the author of his misfortunes remained; and, seeing only the face before him, and writing there as upon a tablet the bitter story of his griefs, he steeled his heart against compassion, and, bringing every faculty to his help, he cut over the feeble guard at last, and laid my lord a dying man upon the crimson carpet before him.

And now there arose such a babble of voices, such oaths and cries and curses, as never had been known, and never would be known again, in the story of Medmenham Abbey.

Sir Richard Escombe

While some crowded about my lord, others ran out bawling for their horses, striking the lackeys who delayed, and proclaiming themselves little better than madmen. The women fell to a very orgy, drinking, moaning, weeping, quarrelling. Lights were put out, fiddlers sent headlong, all the doors thrown open, the very high-road made a pandemonium.

In the refectory itself strong hands lifted my lord to the couch, and the men who stood about swore by every word which could compel their honor that he should not die unavenged.

The rule was their armament. And had not Sir Richard Escombe declared himself that he would answer with his life before the hour of sunset.



Book II

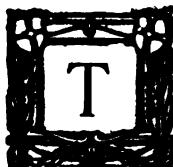
In which the Unexpected Happens





XXXII

MY LORD CLAIMS THE PENALTY



HERE were men galloping away to London during the whole of the long night which followed upon my lord's disaster.

Never before in the story of the Hell Fire Club had such a hurly-burly of retreat been known.

Men in their alarm forgot even the names of those who had come under their protection to the place.

The women, scared to desperation, went home as they could—some in chaises, taken haphazard; some upon the saddles of the least cowardly of the masqueraders; others traipsing it like very drabs.

And yet we find that among those who were left behind the women outnumbered the men considerably.

Some of these, poor souls, had little enough to lose. London was no eternal city for them, with its cold and harsh streets, its black darkness and its unchanging poverty. Here, at Medmenham, they had discovered green fields and a winding river and a clear blue sky above them. They cared nothing for what might follow after.

So, too, some of the men were incapable of going. Mere striplings unaccustomed to the bottle, they awoke at dawn unaware that there had been any trouble at all.

Sir Richard Escombe

A few, and these the oldest and the shrewdest of the members, knew that they would be responsible whatever happened, and so stood by the chaplain and were resolved to see him through. After all, the risks of discovery were small. Was not Sir Richard still in the house? And were there not men upon the road determined that he should not leave?

"We must get my lord to his own house and then deal with the man afterward," old Tobias said, wisely. "Whatever may have been our promise, we cannot hold by it, gentlemen. A scandal at Medmenham might be a hanging matter. Let His Lordship be moved safely to London, and the rest is easy. I will answer for it—I who have seen the old place through many troubles and will see it through more in the days to come."

To which Ailsa rejoined that it depended upon my lord and the physician they had summoned from Reading. Neither he nor any man might deny that Harborne's condition was a perilous one. Lying there, almost where he had fallen, upon a bed dragged from the chaplain's own room, his face as white as the dawn light, this actor in many a courtly play had laid down his mask forever. The rare words he spoke were not of regret, but of the future. It was horrible to see the palsied hand raised to a gesture of menace, while he cried, "The penalty, the penalty! He shall pay the penalty!" for this desire of vengeance remained supreme. "The club must deal with Richard Escombe."

"He will utter the words in hell," Churchill said, with a shrug. "As for the rest of us, we shall be lucky when we get him home. Whatever is to be asked of Richard Escombe must not be asked this night. We are all agreed upon that, gentlemen?"

Sir Richard Escombe

"Most certainly agreed," said the chaplain; "let a story be made, and no word of the truth will get abroad. I count upon your discretion, gentlemen. Lord Harborne has fallen from his horse. He was brought here in the condition in which we find him. If the truth comes out afterward it will be easy to deal with it. Whatever happens, it must not be known that he fell here."

"Which is to suppose that Escombe will hold his tongue?" said Sir Francis.

"He will hold his tongue when we tell him that we abrogate the rule. There is nothing plainer. His silence, our complaisance. Good God, gentlemen, we could have this man's life! Is he to remain ignorant of that?"

"He will not be ignorant of it," said the poet Whitehead. "There is a man who is ignorant of nothing. Look to yourselves in the matter, for I tell you plainly that if Richard Escombe does not shoot himself in this house you are the luckiest men in Europe to-night. Will he have it said that he refused a debt of honor? I remind you that he was a member of this place before some of us had heard of it. Do you think that such a man will put himself into the power of any drunkard who cares to point the finger at him?"

Here was a point of view which had not occurred to any of them, and black were the faces when Whitehead had spoken. How, indeed, if Sir Richard Escombe, refusing the clemency of cowards, determined that his own honor demanded assent to my lord's claim? A foolish view, says the latter-day critic. But honor made a fool of many a man in those days, and this big-hearted Celt was no better than his fellows when honor was at stake.

"In that case, God help us," said Ailsa, dryly. "If the

Sir Richard Escombe

man is mad enough to shoot himself we are as good as done for. I shall believe it when I see the pistol. Life is not so cheap that men barter it for any slut's opinion."

"And Sir Richard Escombe must know something of slander," said Churchill—"what do you say, Cunningham?"

The fat fop had not opened his lips until this time. The figure of the moribund man appalled him. An awakened imagination told him that the day must come when he would lie even as that man lay—in the throes of death, with gossips whispering in the corner and men to ask themselves: "Where do we benefit by this?" Truly the drops of sweat rolled from Cunningham's brow.

"I say little," he exclaimed, as well as his parched tongue would permit him; "a bottle of wine would be more to my liking. Good God, how the sun shines! What a cursed light for a man at such a time! Egad! I could drink a bottle with any man."

The proposition was much to their liking. A lackey, yawning in spite of all that had happened, set a couple of bottles of wine before them and they began to drink, the sun shining brightly through the great arches—the wounded man turning restlessly or raising himself up to repeat the cry: "The penalty, the penalty!" In this way they greeted the day—thus they kept vigil about the terrible bed.

And what of Dick Escombe? Men had been posted upon all the roads to make sure he did not ride out to tell his story before others could tell it for him. They might well have spared their pains. Escombe had no more thought of quitting Medmenham than of taking a journey to America. He knew that he must answer to these men as the rule dictated. Let him refuse, and they would take care that all London knew of his refusal to-morrow.

Sir Richard Escombe

He, Richard Escombe, a coward! He a man who had fled from death! Ironical, almost, and yet, with a terrible tragedy of irony about it all, he admitted the position in which he had placed himself and understood his danger. My lord claimed the penalty. What answer to that save the answer John Wilkes had named for the salvation of the club and the security of those who visited it?

Let the case be not misunderstood. Richard Escombe was not the man to die in the heroic mood, a giant Hercules visiting the Shades, or a new Achilles defying the social lightning.

He despised this place. Although he had been a member of it many years ago, the occasions of his visits were so few that he had never been accounted one of the elect or claimed the privilege of the inner coterie.

When he thrashed Harborne because of Willy Fenton's death in the club, he had blamed the dead youth for bowing to a decree of rogues and admitting that they had any title to be the janizaries of other men's honor.

And now he stood in young Fenton's place; just as the lad had gone forth to die by his own hand, so must he die.

The alternative was the laughter and jeers of his fellow-men, the cry of cravens, the hand withheld and the head averted. Oh, be sure Dick understood all this as he walked by the river and watched the glory of the golden east. He had played for a great stake and had lost. It might have been so different.

The dawn had broken by this time; the day had come in gloriously. All the woods about the abbey warmed the still air with their fragrant breath. The river rippled and splashed against the mossy banks as though it also awakened from refreshing sleep.

Sir Richard Escombe

Distantly, across the mead, a farm-house sent forth honest laborers following their leisurely horses to the harvest fields. A barge passed, and there were children awake and singing in the cuddy. Greater contrasts were not to be imagined; the temple of nature and the temple of man, the woven gaud and the unsurpassable coloring of field and flower and thicket.

Escombe looked down upon these, and knew that it would be hard to die. He remembered that Kitty would have reached her house long since, and wondered if she were sleeping. And here a certain consolation came to cheer him. His death must save the woman he loved from all the shame that Medmenham Abbey might have put upon her. No man would dare speak ill of Kitty if Richard Escombe were dead.

It would now have been about five o'clock of the morning. All who had determined to fly the sinking ship were already gone from Medmenham. Some twenty horses in the stables, and post-boys lying upon the straw or bare stones told of the faithful or the helpless few. Such as kept their heads were grouped about my lord, who had still the strength to cry with blackened lips: "The penalty, the penalty!"

A weird and horrible figure of a glittering jest. And to be played to the bitter end, as it would seem, in the finest spirit of the monks of St. Francis.

XXXIII

AUNT ELIZABETH GOES UPON A JOURNEY



AUNT ELIZABETH had been very busy these later days, and the shadow of good Queen Anne came often upon the scene.

Here was a fine old woman, who believed that dead dukes and duchesses, to say nothing of miscellaneous royalty, awaited her in heaven, but that on earth her glory was merely retrospective. And lo and behold, she is suddenly plunged into the very whirlpool of her desires; listens famishingly to stories of plot and counterplot; talks familiarly of my lord and the others, as though they had been on her visiting-list since she was a girl; and finally determines that nothing is lacking to King George's happiness but her immediate appearance at court.

From this somewhat optimistic delusion Kitty Dulcimore alone saved an amiable old lady.

"My dear aunt," she said, some days before the great event at Medmenham, "all that has happened is such an old, old story. The King would never be serious if you told him. I shall not see Lord Harborne again; and when you are tired of me I shall go back to Warwickshire to marry—who knows, perhaps the curate. Please don't think of it any more. I am very happy here, and I wish you to be happy."

Sir Richard Escombe

To all of which Aunt Elizabeth would answer "Pish!"
A favorite exclamation of hers, and expressive withal.

"A curate! God save the child's reason! Why not old Williams the groom? Does the parson, then, look to marry in the parlor nowadays? Strange times, surely, we are come upon. I'd like to see the curate in my parish who would look twice at a gentleman's daughter! A pretty thing to hear, upon my word!"

"But, dear aunt, you are all for the apostolic succession."

"The apostolic fiddlesticks. Those who married at all married fisherwomen. When will you learn a little common-sense, Kitty? Here's a great nobleman waiting to make you his wife, and you talk of never seeing him again. Ah, if I had been your age! I'd have made him eloquent enough. I'd have found out where he kept the family jewels. But the girls, bless me, they're all for the nursery nowadays. No wit, no cleverness—nothing, as the good Queen would say, which men like to find in them."

"We are as God made us, aunt, and there are some who do not quarrel with the work."

"Wasting your beauty upon fledglings. What did Lord Bolingbroke say of Catherine Hill, who used to play at the King's Theatre? 'She cast her roses at a bull's foot'—meaning old Sir John Morgrave, who kept her dangling fifteen years and then married his housekeeper. That's what you will do with my lord if you play your cards badly. Ah, you should trust an old woman; you should be advised by her. She's been the friend to the best Queen that ever sat upon a throne. Never a word of hers that wasn't listened to respectfully; never a piece of advice that was not thankfully received."

Kitty did not dispute this claim. As Aunt Elizabeth

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upon the only occasion of her appearance at St. James's had merely said "Thank you, ma'am," to good Queen Anne, the range of argument was clearly limited.

Perhaps the comedy of the whole thing amused Kitty above its sordid scheming. She realized that the old woman cared for little but the part she herself might possibly play in the affair. Twenty times had she dissuaded Elizabeth from riding immediately to London and asking His Lordship what he meant by it. Her aunt's good-natured offers to proceed to Windsor and consult His Majesty upon so delicate an affair were equally embarrassing and to be frustrated only by some finesse. And then upon it all came the news of Dick's accident, of his disappearance from Windsor, and of the ignorance of all concerning his immediate whereabouts.

Kitty, as we remember, sent a messenger to the castle, and by such means she learned the distressing tidings of Sir Richard's misfortune. The succeeding days were very hard to live through, and only the great courage of resignation supported her. If she had been impatient with her aunt before, the daily talk of my lord, the Queen, and the court—that medley of past, present, and future—now became intolerable to her. Many a scheme her clever head devised for ascertaining the truth about Dick, and one of these certainly she would have pursued but for an unexpected development—to wit, the departure of her aunt, in the great family coach, upon an errand Kitty could but guess at, and with a courage which remained stupendous.

Kitty, coming down late after a restless night, heard the news from one of the younger maids, little Sarah, who told it with many gasps and much needless reiteration of obvious facts.

Sir Richard Escombe

"This very morning, miss—I do speak truth—in the great yellow coach as hasn't been used this ever so long. Oh, I don't know nothing about it, but Williams says it be to Windsor to see the great folks what missus used to know when she was a girl like me. They're to be away a week or more, and, who knows, perhaps missus will come back with a crownet. That's what Williams says, and he's a man as is to be believed, though he has been left behind; and don't you take on unkindly, Miss Kitty, for we'll look after you, every one of us, and if there be any friend you'd like to come and see you, nothing will be said when missress come back, as I'm a true Christian."

Kitty thanked her, but made no comment. The old lady's departure seemed to her a comedy ironical, but not the only one these swift weeks had provoked. She could imagine the silver-haired grand dame rolling on toward Windsor, thence to London perhaps; could see her courtesying here and courtesying there, bowing to the very pages in her desire to win lofty favors. And what would she do when she came to St. James's? For Kitty did not know that her father was in London, and that Elizabeth intended, after she had seen the King, to meet him there; not only to give him a piece of her mind, but if possible to raise an eloquent voice in the presence of Lord Harborne himself.

"The child shall marry my lord," she had said. "I'll hunt him out of London if he dares to refuse me; I'll go with it to the King. Ah, if the Duke had been alive! I lost a friend, indeed, when he died. But that's no reason why Kitty should not marry His Lordship. Let the dead look after the dead. I'll go to St. James's to-morrow, and then we'll hear what the man has to say. Deny me! Pish!" said Aunt Elizabeth.

Sir Richard Escombe

So she set off on the morning of the tenth day after Richard Escombe's accident. Rising very early, and having arranged the matter with her servant, she spared Kitty the formality of an adieu, believing, it may be, that Frederick Viscount Harborne would return in the coach with her, and that the Archbishop's blessing in violet ink would burn the lining of his pocket.

Things fell out oddly enough in the hours which succeeded Aunt Elizabeth's departure.

In the first place, Kitty spent a dull and uneventful morning amid her roses, asking herself a hundred perplexing questions, and being unable to answer any of them to her satisfaction. Chiefly, it need hardly be said, the debate concerned Sir Richard and his misfortune.

Kitty had wished to believe that the accident overtook Dick when he was riding to her house, but she had been unable to gather a tittle of evidence that this was the case, and of course there was that little voice of jealousy in her ear to say that Dick might have been riding to some one else's house. Had it not been so, she would have heard some news of him by this time. The world about her was so small, every one knew so much and so little of his neighbor's business, that she might well think secrecy impossible. And this hardened her heart again. She began to feel toward her lover as she had felt at Brighton.

"If I were anything to him he would have sent the news somehow," she would say; "nothing but kindness toward him made me believe that he had been coming here. Of course, he was on his way to London. He may have met the woman Honor Marwood there, and the accident be all a tale for willing ears. I'll believe nothing until I know it. I was ever foolish to have listened to it at all."

Sir Richard Escombe

So it ran on, in the finest spirit of one who has been listening to the evil tongue of Madam Mar-All. Kitty did not believe a word of her own story, but things had now come to such a pass that she repeated it quite cheerfully and almost enjoyed a sense of martyrdom, imagining herself to be a very Ariadne, slain by Theseus, in pursuit of a dancing-girl or a pink-cheeked beauty among the maids at St. James's.

This endured during the whole day following upon her aunt's departure. She did not stir from her garden even at meal-times. When the vicar of the parish called upon her in his best coat and bands, she scandalized him by her flippancy, and routed him finally with some verses of an Irish song Dick had taught her down in Westmoreland.

At eight o'clock she said that she would go to bed and dream of her wrongs. It would be good to lie and sob in the moonlight with the pale beams making jewels of her tears; but she flogged the roses soundly before she went, and a quite unprejudiced observer would have said that temper and not sorrow now governed her mind. In which mood, at a quarter-past eight precisely, just when she had flung her bodice upon the bed and loosened great masses of hair from her pretty head, what must happen but that the girl Sarah came flying to the room and upon her heels the faithful Williams, anxious to witness the declaration of such astonishing tidings.

"Miss Kitty, Miss Kitty! oh, please to open the door! Mother Clegg is here, and she has news, Miss Kitty—"

Kitty coiled up her hair again, and opened the door slowly. She was still flushed and angry, and quite unmoved by so dramatic a summons.

Sir Richard Escombe

“Well, Sarah, and what is it?”

“Oh, Miss Kitty, oh, what I have heard—”

“Has anything happened to my aunt?”

“Oh, worse than that, miss; Sir Richard Escombe—oh, miss—he’s living with Mother Clegg at the cottage, and so dreadful ill they’re all a-fearin’ he’ll go to heaven this night.”

Kitty made a great effort; she pretended to be quite unmoved.

“And why has Mother Clegg sent you to me, Sarah?”

“Because, miss, Sir Richard’s asking for you in his sleep so as you can hear him down the lane. Oh, please do listen to what Anne Clegg has to say! You’d never forgive yourself if you didn’t, miss.”

We know the sequel well. Kitty commanded the faithful Williams to get a coach from the Crown Inn at Marlow, while she sent the obsequious and courtesying Anne back to the cottage headlong, that Dick might not lack her ministrations.

The old woman, quite unaware that she had been directed to Elizabeth Dulcimore’s house for a purpose, and that the man who advised her to let Kitty Dulcimore know was the ruffian Musgrove himself, went uncomplainingly; and when the best part of an hour had passed, Kitty herself set out in a crazy carriage, Williams riding by the driver’s side and one of the gardeners in the dicky behind.

But the man who drove the coach had five of Musgrove’s guineas already in his pocket; and when he conducted the party into a convenient ditch, not a hundred yards from the gate of Medmenham Abbey, he believed that his money had been well earned.

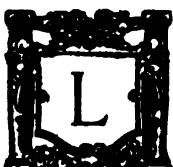


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Oddly enough, it was almost at this hour that Aunt Elizabeth, having been most rudely treated at Windsor, and determining to choose a better opportunity for visiting London, had turned her horses' heads again toward Marlow, and come home a sadder but by no means a wiser woman.

XXXIV

KITTY RETURNS TO MARLOW



ORD REPTON, at Sir Richard's request, carried Kitty from the club at Medmenham; nor did he leave her until she stood within the porch of Aunt Elizabeth's house at Marlow.

A phlegmatic man, he had exchanged few words with her during that brief journey. When she asked him, in a low, sweet voice, if he thought that there would be a meeting between my lord and Sir Richard, he answered very bluntly that he did not know. "But," said he, "God help the old man if they fight!" At which Kitty trembled anew, for she knew the rule; and had she not been compelled to overhear that which passed between Musgrove and Whitwould?

"I pray God not," she exclaimed, very earnestly; "they would claim his life, Marquis. You know what men they are; you cannot keep it from me."

Repton shook his head wisely.

"That would do them little good," he said, shortly. "George would be very angry if he heard of it. Take my advice, young lady; if the shoe pinches, remember George. A pretty bootmaker—good fit every time."

Kitty, to her misfortune, scarcely heard him. Her deductions were wiser than his, and were cumulative. The

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rule. How instantly it had been obeyed! She remembered every word of it, "as drawn up by our wise brother John Wilkes for the salvation of this community." Would these men spare Richard Escombe? And had not he drawn the sword for her sake?

She perceived instantly what an advantage Harborne would possess, for she could not contemplate my lord's death; nor had it entered into her reckoning. He would claim the pledge from her Dick. Mad and frightful as the words of that tragic jest were, she accepted every one of them for the law in that home of infamy. Dick must answer, and for her he must sacrifice his honor or his life.

Shall we wonder, then, that she returned in silence? When the carriage entered the little drive before Aunt Elizabeth's door she perceived the house to be brilliantly lighted, and wondered if the sociable Sarah had been entertaining the neighborhood in her absence. She made no mention of it, however, and took leave of Repton with some composure.

"You will return to Medmenham?" she asked him.

He said that there was no necessity, but possibly he would do so.

"Leave it to the common-sense of the place," said he; "there won't be any mischief; they don't want mischief. If Sir Richard listens to me, I'll have him at Windsor before the guard is changed in the morning. Just go in and sleep soundly, and don't think any more about it. That's the wisest thing to do."

She admitted it, and left him with just a warm word of thanks. The arrival of the coach had set the hounds baying, and Kitty was still in her aunt's porch when the great door was flung open somewhat violently, and the silver-

Sir Richard Escombe

haired old dame herself stood, like an accusing figure of wrath, plain to be seen in the aureole of the lamp.

"Mistress Dulcimore, what does this mean?"

"That I have come home, aunt—so tired, so tired."

Aunt Elizabeth shaded the candle from the wind and examined the truant's face narrowly.

"I heard a man's voice. Who was with you, child?"

"The Marquis of Repton, aunt."

"Ah, and is that the man who takes you from your home at this hour of the night?"

"He is the man, aunt, and I am the woman. Please do not keep me on the step. I am perishing with cold."

"God save us all! Did an honest woman ever hear such a story before? The Marquis of Repton—and I have been running to London after another. Kitty, Kitty, my child, are you mad?"

"Not mad, aunt, but very cold and hungry. I have been to the Hell Fire Club."

She said it without a thought, just as she might have told the old lady that she had been to London to visit the Marylebone Gardens, or over to Windsor to sup with the King. As for Aunt Elizabeth, she stared for a few moments as though she were listening to the babblings of a maniac. A less clever woman would have slammed the door in Kitty's face, and so given the signal for a new chapter of events upon the high-road; but Aunt Elizabeth's brains were above the common, and the very impudence of the words Kitty spoke called her back to reason.

As in a flash, this old lady perceived that some villain had entrapped her niece and carried her to the unnamable club. All her anger vanished in an instant. Shutting the door quietly, she took Kitty's cold hand in her own and led her

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toward the parlor. No word was spoken; no further question put for many minutes—just a woman's sympathy expressed, and that so cleverly and with such sincerity that all Kitty's valor melted in a moment, and she lay sobbing in Elizabeth's arms as though her heart would break.

"Aunt, dear aunt, they have put me to such shame! And his life is in danger, aunt. What shall I do to save him? My Dick, whom I have loved all my life! Oh, tell me, tell me, what shall I do to save him?"

God help Aunt Elizabeth, we say, when she listened to this story. Why, there had been no mention of Dick Escombe since Kitty had come to Marlow; not a word breathed about him; not a secret told. And he was the third, remember; for had not the silver-haired old lady already popped Repton and Willoughby in the scales, and weighed their chances critically?

"To save him, child—your Dick—but who, in God's name, is he, Kitty, and how did he come to be there?"

"He came to the club because he knew they had taken me there—I cannot tell you, dear aunt—I remember so little. Oh, I am so cold and hungry! and Dick is there, and they will kill him if he remains—and, aunt, I cannot help him; I cannot, I cannot!"

And so she sobbed on, and so at every word Aunt Elizabeth hugged her closer, and there, in the dawn light, these two women comforted each other as only women can in the hours of their distress.

True, it was something of a shock to Elizabeth that Kitty should speak of hunger, and, by implication, of baked meats, amid such a threnody; but the old lady wisely put this down to the child's hysterical condition; and no sooner did she understand that Kitty had not taken bite or sup



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since tea-time yesterday than she roused the maids with resonant voice, caused the fires to be lighted, despite the month, and generally prescribed that vigorous treatment by which fatigue and cold are to be successfully resisted.

All this permitted a good hour to pass. The sun rose before Kitty had drunk her posset and eaten sparingly of the food which Elizabeth pressed upon her with kindly insistence. There was no thought of bed, however. It was the top of the morning when, hand in hand upon the sofa, the two exchanged those swift questionings and responses which meant so much to both of them.

"They took you to the club, Kitty?"

"Lord Harborne, I am sure. He sent a man I had seen at Brighton. I should have recognized him earlier. He has been watching the house for some days, aunt."

"The villain—if I had seen him. Is it Richard Escombe, the rebel, you speak of?"

"No rebel, aunt. The King knows that. He is now at Windsor, and will be made Governor of the Castle, they say. I heard that he had met with an accident, and that he wished me to come to him. It was half a truth—and I went. Then they drove the coach into the ditch—and you know what happened."

"Will ye tell me about the place, child? Queer stories are told; ye have seen strange things there?"

Kitty answered her as best she could. Her memories were all of lights and laughter and wine; of savage men, masked and unmasked; of drunken voices and hollow-eyed women. She spoke more particularly of the scene between the old fop Whitwould and the man Musgrove. She tried to tell her aunt particularly of that and of the rule by which men take their own lives in the name of women.

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"The wickedness of it! And the women not caring a penny-piece whether the pair of them are alive or dead! Go on, child."

"There was a great quarrel over a dreadful woman, and then a person they called the chaplain intervened. He read the rule, and all laughed at it. I saw the woman go out with Mr. Musgrove, and that was the end of it."

"There would be many of the quality there, Kitty?"

"I recognized Lord Ailsa and, I think, Lord Churchill. They have both enjoyed my father's hospitality, and yet they permitted the others to insult me. Oh, if I were a man, aunt!—oh, if I could go back to them now—"

Aunt Elizabeth shook her head. She could permit no treason to be spoken against the qualities.

"They planned no hurt to you, Kitty. Great men must have their humors. I doubt not they meant to send you home, and that things went further than any one imagined. Was Sir Richard in the club when you came in?"

Kitty shook her head. She related the circumstances, often interrupted—and, now speaking with a new excitement, she confessed her fears for Dick's safety.

"He has broken the rule, aunt, and they will demand his life. Oh, don't you see how many enemies he has among them. He did it for my sake—can I do nothing for him?"

"He'll never be such a fool as to kill himself. What! For a multitude of tipsy fellows who are not fit to lace his shoes! If your Sir Richard Escombe is the man I take him to be, he'll be half-way to Windsor by this time."

"But you don't know Dick, aunt—you don't know what an Irishman is when they put him on his honor. Of course, Sir Richard is not wholly an Irishman—but he's more than



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than anything else, and some of them will remember it. That's why I am so afraid for him. He is there for my sake, and I can do nothing, nothing. They will claim the penalty, and he will pay it. Has not his whole life been just like that? So quick to take offence, so proud—and now this, for my sake, because he knew I was in danger."

The reflection was insupportable to little Kitty. She repeated it a hundred times.

Dick would obey the rule and would destroy himself.

None of Aunt Elizabeth's cold logic could prevail against her warm conviction. She depicted her lover alone among the ruffians of Medmenham, proud, defiant, heedless of all else but his honor. She imagined the advantage of my lord so unexpectedly enjoyed. The wild scene of carousal and orgy she had just quitted would be fitly capped by this wanton sacrifice of a brave man's life. And she herself could do nothing. She must sit here, with the glorious sunshine creeping into the old room, and say that the day had no meaning for her, the dawn no voice.

And was Elizabeth Dulcimore no more fertile in idea? Not for the moment, certainly. She had still many questions to put—of my lord's appearance, of his words and manner and gestures; questions concerning that scamp Ailsa and the fat fop Cunningham and the gentle scoundrel Churchill. When these were answered, she bethought her of another.

"Did you say that the Marquis brought you home?—ah, a proper man. His father was somebody, as the good Queen told me. I remember that my Lord Bolingbroke and I had many a word about him. Did he say nothing of your being at the abbey?"

"I remember too little of it, aunt. He spoke of the King—"

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"Of the King? Ah, such a man would speak of the King!"

"And of a shoe which pinched at Medmenham because of the King. Do you think, aunt, if we rode to Windsor—"

She paused, half afraid of her own idea. The King! Would he permit such an infamy as this? Would he refuse her audience—the King, who had spoken so gently to her at Northumberland House and, before that, at the Palace?

Oh, why had she not thought of it before? Why had she lost these precious hours? Dick might already have bowed to this vindictive and terrible jest. She could have cried the story of her penitence to the very heavens.

"Yes, yes!" she exclaimed, rising suddenly and almost dragging Elizabeth with her, "we will go to the King, aunt—now, this minute—to Windsor, to the castle. We will tell him what is happening at Medmenham; we will ask him if he wishes this to be. For Dick's sake, dear aunt, for Dick's sake, we will go this instant."

"But, child, they tell me—that is to say, a rude fellow at the inn would have it—that the King is at Hampton Court."

"I care not, aunt, if he be at the world's end. Am I to sit here idle when Dick's life is in danger? And you—oh, but you will not, you dare not, because you are a brave woman—because you love a brave man. We will go together—now, this instant—for Dick's sake—to the King!"

And what could old Elizabeth answer? Was there not a magnetic attraction in the very words—"the King"? True, she had been bundled unceremoniously from Windsor not twenty-four hours ago—but this child of hers, this clever little girl, would men refuse her audience? As in a splendid vision, Elizabeth saw herself courtesying in a great

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room with a throne at the farther end of it. Courtiers in cloth of gold were all about her; men did her homage wherever she turned; the King raised her up and addressed gentle words to her. At last the ambition of these later years should be realized. She would go to the King—and Kitty should utter an open sesame.

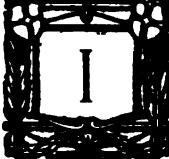
Very early in the morning these two brave women set out. The tragic yellow coach carried them—Williams rode, as ever, upon the imperial seat, a promoted gardener in the dicky.

And they were going to see the King, that they might bring him to Richard Escombe's aid—if aid were still possible under such sorry circumstances.

Be sure that Kitty did not hide this from herself. Dick, she said, would act upon any mad impulse should honor seem to demand obedience. He would never live that others might call him craven—and she knew what clemency he had to expect from those who welcomed her to Medmenham.

XXXV

AUDIENCE

T was nine o'clock of the morning when the crazy old coach entered the narrow streets of Eton, some ten minutes later when it rolled up to the door of the White Hart Inn and a very small landlord with a very large head helped the ladies to alight.

He, in answer to their earnest entreaties, at once decided a subject pregnant of debate during the journey.

The King was at Windsor. His Majesty had ridden in from Hampton Court last night. "And I do not doubt, ladies," the landlord said, with a twinkle in his self-indulgent eyes—"I do not doubt that he is waiting for you both at this moment."

Aunt Elizabeth took this compliment very kindly. The journey had extorted some embarrassing confessions from that vigorous old lady, and she was glad that they should be forgotten.

"It would have been so different had the good Queen been alive," she said—"just a word to an equerry and the thing is done. But these Germans are odd folk, Kitty. His Majesty may never have heard my name. It is not impossible. Who recollects Bolingbroke nowadays? Who talks of the old Duke? I may go to Windsor as a very



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stranger. But they'll listen when I get there, be sure of that; they'll listen when I talk to them."

"My dear aunt," said Kitty, "may it be as you say. The King lives much in public, but for that reason few speak privately to him. Should we meet a friend at Windsor it will be less difficult. But I remember none who would help us; and our need is so great—God knows how great it is!"

"All the more reason that we should go straight to the King ourselves. Let me see the sentry who would keep me out. Oh, I'll talk to him loud enough, be sure of it! I'll make him mind his manners. And then, Kitty, you see, we shall not be expected to stay at the inn any longer. Rooms will be prepared for us. It was always so in the good Queen's day. A more hospitable woman never lived, as I know well—so kindly, so gracious, that none of her friends forget her even to-day."

It was all harmless enough, but it tried Kitty's patience sorely. Even here at Windsor she saw little of the scene about her, scarcely lifted her eyes as they passed through the village to look at the old red-brick buildings of Eton, remembered nothing of the boats upon the river when they crossed the old stone bridge, and read, in the castle's massive walls, little beyond a dungeon story which ran so well with her own gloomy thoughts.

Dick needed all her wits, and yet she could give of them but sparingly. Her recollection named no friend in Windsor who would be likely to help her. She did not believe that she knew one human being in all the town, and her joy and satisfaction are to be imagined when, almost as she entered the inn, a breathless figure hailed her boisterously, and she turned, to find herself face to face with no other

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than Ensign Willoughby, whom she had always called cousin, and would so call until the end of her days.

"Oh, Cousin Willoughby, Cousin Willoughby, is it indeed you!"

"If it isn't," said Willoughby, "I'll be hanged if I know who it is. Saw you as you passed the chapel at Eton, and ran all the way. What a devil of a coach, Kitty! They'll make verses to it here. And so you're in Windsor to see the lions! By gad! you made me run, though. I thought I was winning a cup."

He pressed his hand to his heart, gasping still for breath. The undress uniform of Dragoons suited his young figure admirably. Indeed, Elizabeth thought him a very pretty boy, and she asked Kitty to introduce her.

"But did you say Lord Willoughby, Kitty?"

"No, aunt, but he'll be that some day. This is Mr. Willoughby of the Dragoons."

"Ah, the young man you ran away with from Brighton. Let me look at him, Kitty."

Ensign Willoughby, needless to say, blushed to the roots of his flaxen hair. Never had a poor devil served a sorrier apprenticeship to the amorous arts than he. Credited with Kitty's favors, debited with the continuous chaff of his friends, here he was quizzed by this silver-haired old lady, just as though he and Kitty were about to go honeymooning together and a bishop had blessed them. Willoughby hated Aunt Elizabeth. He wished she had never been born.

"Everybody will look at us if we stand in the doorway," he said, to turn the subject. "I suppose you're staying here some time, Miss Kitty, or is it only a flying visit?"



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"We have come to see the King," rejoined Kitty, eagerly.
"We must see him at once, Cousin Willoughby."

The boy whistled expressively, moving away as he did so to the great parlor upon the left-hand side of the doorway.

"You're not modest, I must say, Miss Kitty. Does the Chamberlain know about it?"

"Nobody knows. We have come to tell His Majesty something he should hear now, this instant, Cousin Willoughby. You will help us. We are quite lost here, but every one knows you, and you will tell us what to do."

"I wish I could, Miss Kitty. You understand, this is no easy thing. Lots of people see the King, but it's another matter altogether to speak to him. And I must know what it's all about. They'll ask me that before they give me any answer at all."

"Say that Elizabeth Dulcimore desires to see His Majesty upon an affair of some importance," the old lady intervened. "Odd if she must come to Windsor and another speak to the King on her behalf."

"Say, rather, that two ladies would speak to His Majesty about the club at Medmenham," Kitty corrected.

At this Ensign Willoughby opened his eyes wide enough.
"The club at Medmenham! What can ladies know about that?"

"I was there last night as my Lord Harborne's guest," said Kitty, quietly. "The King must know what happened. He would never forgive me if I kept it from him."

"You were at Medmenham, Kitty—you?"
"I was at Medmenham Abbey, cousin, and I have come to tell the King what happened there. He will thank me for coming. He would wish you to be my ambassador. Please go to him at once, in my name—and my aunt's,"

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she added, quickly, observing the frown gathering upon Elizabeth's brow.

Cousin Willoughby heard her patiently, but with a certain sadness which lately colored all that he did.

He was no fool, and he understood perfectly well that Sir Richard Escombe was mixed up in this affair. Had not the genial Captain been ten days absent from Windsor—with Kitty, as the boy now argued; and the excursion had ended in some tragedy. Curiosity would have asked twenty questions concerning it all, but Kitty's manner became impetuous. He was too amazed to reflect at the moment upon all that her visit to the abbey implied. He could but blunder into a commonplace, and one which provoked her almost to anger.

"But the King will want to know, Kitty—"

"And I will tell him, Cousin Willoughby. Oh, of your old friendship for me, do not delay. Are you less my friend because of what has happened? I will believe it when you tell me so. And is not Sir Richard Escombe a comrade of yours? Do soldiers refuse to help each other when they are in danger? Cousin Willoughby, you will go now, straight to the King. Whatever happens, you will go to the King."

Her manner was very earnest. She had never made a prettier figure—that of a beautiful woman pleading for the man she loved; of a friend speaking to a friend who would understand her. As for Ensign Willoughby, he went off like a shot, and when a long, dreary half-hour had passed, he returned with a chamberlain's wisdom upon his tongue, and some little hope, of which he made the most.

"I have seen Lord Suffolk," said he, "and he has promised that the King shall know. You are both to go into the

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park and wait in the Broad Walk there. His Majesty will pass about ten o'clock, and then Lord Suffolk will speak to him. But you mustn't expect too much, Kitty. The King hears this kind of story every day; and you remember what he said to Sir Robert: 'Confidence is a plant of slow growth in an aged bosom.' I shouldn't wonder if he laughed at us all."

"But at least he will hear us," said Kitty, triumphantly; "and when he has heard us it will be time to speak of some one else. You are a friend, indeed, cousin. Sir Richard will never forget what you have done for him."

Ensign Willoughby made but a poor reply to this. He does not appear to have been moved by the promise of Richard Escombe's gratitude, nor, we imagine, would he have cared a King George farthing if the Baronet had been left wholly out of the reckoning.

Aunt Elizabeth, upon the other hand, seemed to think that the millennium had come. Was she not about to speak to the King? Robes of cloth of gold would have sat lightly upon her shoulders on such a day. She did not rest one instant until they had quitted the inn and were out in the Broad Walk—full half an hour before their time—waiting for His Majesty to pass. The intervening moments were so many triumphant instants of expectation for Elizabeth Dulcimore. She detected nobility in the very gardeners. A passing lackey had the air of a prince of the blood.

It was exactly a quarter to eleven when the King rode out from the castle. Lord Suffolk cantered after him lazily until he espied the ladies and remembered his promise; while the equerries, following at a discreet distance, were not a little amazed to see His Majesty nodding and whisper-

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ing and then reining in to speak to a pair of apparently humble women upon the sidewalk.

In truth, all who have written of this circumstance bear witness to the unexpected nature of it. Perhaps George had been told that Kitty was pretty—this is no place to speak of his morals—but, however it might have been, he certainly came to a halt and examined Elizabeth and Kitty very narrowly. Then he spoke to Lord Suffolk, and with no encouragement in his tone.

“The young one I have seen before,” he said. “Who is the other?”

Lord Suffolk answered it, evasively.

“I understand they have come from Medmenham Abbey, as I reminded Your Majesty.”

The King continued the conversation in German. He cut a fine enough figure on horseback, and his somewhat angular features, the great bob wig and a soldier’s carriage, belied the common account of him. Nothing, however, would have made an Englishman of him.

“Are these the kind of women who go to the monks’ house? I am very much surprised. Why do they come here? Am I to be troubled by them?”

He put it somewhat petulantly. There can be no doubt whatever that he would have ridden on immediately but for Kitty’s boldness. She, fearing the worst, approached the King regardless of any etiquette, and, going up almost to his saddle-bow, she said:

“Your Majesty, Sir Richard Escombe is in danger at Medmenham Abbey. He has forfeited his life by the rules of the club. If you do not help us, I have no friend. Oh, sir, hear me, as you have promised to hear any who brought



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you news of that dreadful place. Send those who will save Sir Richard."

She was eloquent enough by this time, and her eloquence might have done her a mischief but for my Lord Suffolk, who pushed his horse forward, and so placed himself between Kitty and the King. As for His Gracious Majesty, he did not appear to have heard a single word of it, but he remarked, nevertheless, to my lord, "A very pretty woman—a very, very pretty woman," and instantly touching his horse with his spur, he rode straight on down the magnificent Broad Walk in the direction of Ascot.

And who shall write of Kitty's thoughts as the two poor women returned dolefully to the inn, and the boy Willoughby asked himself what, in God's name, he should do to help them.

XXXVI

HONOR ADVISES



T was nine o'clock of the morning at Medmenham Abbey, and men observed some little abatement of the excitement which had prevailed during the stirring night.

For one thing, a mealy mouthed surgeon from Reading gave my lord some little hope of his life.

"I will not say," he remarked, with a fine flourish, "that the *spes vita* is considerable; nevertheless, I have known worse cases to live, gentlemen. Be assured that what I cannot do for His Lordship will be done by no other. The night will tell us—*nox niger*, as the poet has it. You will find me here at three o'clock. Meanwhile, I am your devoted humble servant." Upon which he swallowed a good pint of wine at a draught, and bowed an adieu to the assembled company.

There were few now in the room with my lord, and such as remained faithful went in and out frequently—some to the buttery; others to watch the lonely figure of Richard Escombe, who still kept vigil by the water-side. If they made little of their observations, they could at least console themselves with the reflection that the fellow was still alive and caged, and their own safety no longer in jeopardy.

Had not Tobias, the chaplain, already spoken of a new

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trick by which not only would they shame the man for life, but also shield themselves from any possible consequences? Here was a triumph of social jurisprudence which sent them merrily to kitchen and buttery. What fools they had been to believe that Richard Escombe would kill himself!

A morning of odd contrasts, surely—in the great room my lord still babbling of his rights and privileges, still muttering those ominous words—"the penalty"; in the buttery little Ruth Wellington and Betty Harmer and Honor Marwood, with Churchill, Ailsa, Cunningham, and Whitehead all fled from the refectory and welcoming the interlude. So merry were the girls that one of them hummed a catch while she took her breakfast:

*Will it be across the sea,
In a land of milk and honey?
Or will you come to London town
To spend the golden money?
Go north, my lads; go south, my lads,
Or any way you fancy;
This is the toast I'll drink to-night—
A health to pretty Nancy!
With a ri-tol-de-lol.*

They hummed it *sotto voce*, all joining in the chorus, and presently Lord Ailsa, lifting a common brown jug which he had filled with claret, toasted Honor Marwood in felicitous terms.

"To the incomparable, the unvanquished, the adorable Honor—mistress of our fortunes, master of our destinies—her ladyship!"

They drank it in solemn silence, during which little Ruth

Sir Richard Fairombe

took the opportunity to remark that Honor was not her ladyship yet, while Betty Harmer indulged in mock sympathies not a little provoking.

"Poor thing," said she, indicating her friend, with a pathetic look, "how she must have suffered last night—all her hopes hanging on the end of a skewer! Honor, dear, I want to go to London in His Lordship's coach—won't you answer me, Honor dear? Ah, she thinks he's going to marry her—what's left of him!"

"His Lordship is under repair," remarked the fat fop Cunningham, who had deposited his wig on the latch of the window and generally made himself at home in the buttery—"under repair like the King's ship, the new *Lord Harry*. When he comes out of dock our dear friend will hoist her flag aboard—and then there'll be the *Lord Harry* to pay."

Honor, on her part, seemed in no mood to exchange wit with them. Had not Harborne sternly commanded her to leave Medmenham without an instant's loss of time?

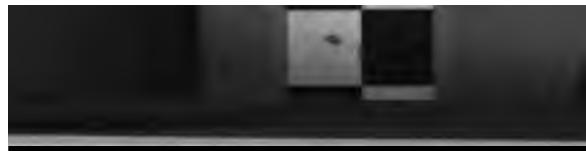
"I must leave you all," she said, a little sadly; "His Lordship will have it so. There's no coach for me except one with rickety wheels. Heigho! I'm for the theatre and the red shoes again, and very well you all know it."

"But you'll drink a glass for luck before you go, Honor?"

"Let her depart in peace, gentlemen," said the chaplain, pompously—he had just come in from the great room—"let her depart in peace. It's nine o'clock of the morning, and the sun shining brightly."

"Ah, yes," cried Cunningham, "and a damnably annoying old sun, too. Take it away, Tobias—take it away."

"Mr. Cunningham prefers the dark," said little Ruth, archly. Cunningham did not deny that.



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"You lost five kisses to me last night," cried he; "don't you think it's about time you paid them, Ruth?"

"Indeed, and I do," says she; "please shut your eyes, Mr. Cunningham."

He obeyed her childishly, pouting his lips as though they were about to be pressed upon red roses; but little Ruth, lifting a coffee-pot which a servant had just placed upon the table, poured some of the streaming liquid over his forehead, and provoked an oath which the bargemen on the river might have envied.

"You little devil!" he roared.

"Don't call me that," says Ruth, sweetly; "am I not a reformed character since I knew you, Mr. Cunningham?—and oh, dear, look at your poor nose!"

A roar of merriment greeted the fop's appearance—it was the first honest laughter heard in that place since my lord had fallen.

"Come, come," pleaded Tobias; "this is most unseemly, most derogatory to my office. Is not Mistress Marwood aware that she is to go to London and await His Lordship there?"

"She's been waiting for him there for the last five years," said Churchill, pleasantly, while little Ruth added the opinion that Honor's desire to go to church was undoubtedly evidence of the reform of which the parson spoke.

"She'll go back to St. Paul's with her feet toward the throne and her back upon the world," was Betty Harmer's dictum, and then she said: "That's marriage all over—setting out in a coach and two, and coming home in a chaise and one. Don't you think Honor will do it very prettily, reverence?"

"That is one thing women can always do well," said

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Tobias, pompously. "In the matter of the matrimonial office even the Church must play second fiddle. And that, gentlemen, is what the Church is not in the habit of doing."

Ruth said that the fiddle was an instrument she hoped to master presently, and this set the tongues wagging again, until some one came in from the great room to say that His Lordship's condition was most certainly improved, and that he would be glad of the attendance of his brethren at his bedside.

"And he is of another mind about you, Mistress Honor," the man said; "he wishes you to stay at Medmenham. But His Lordship would see the gentlemen at once."

"We must go, sirs," said Tobias. "This levity is much out of place upon such an occasion. Ladies, your discretion will allow us to see very little of you this morning. I will command a chaise for you immediately. Even Mistress Honor would be wise to accompany you, I think."

Honor did not demur, though she had no intention of quitting Medmenham. Her shrewd wit told her that my lord might yet recover from his hurt—and where would he find so skilful a nurse or one so devoted to his necessities as she? In truth, he might come to marry her even yet—a vague hope which floated in the woman's mind as a phantasy. When she left the room it was not to set out for town, but to steal a covert interview with Richard Escombe, whom she found in a little arbor by the river and approached with all the confidence of old time. She had much to say to him. Hers was a shrewd head, as he very well knew.

"Ah, Sir Richard, my dear—and is it yourself, now?"

"Who should it be, Honor? Did you expect to find His Lordship here?"

"And what is His Lordship to me after what you've done

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to him? Did you hear that he was better? They're telling the tale all over the house. There's a little surgeon man from Reading who says he'll save that precious life. Ah, Dick dear, if you had killed him I'd be all alone in the world, surely!"

She approached the place, and he made room for her on the bench beside him. He was unusually pale, she thought, and seemed still to be thinking deeply—as a man who seeks resolution and cannot find it. For a while neither spoke; but anon he started as from a reverie and asked her a question.

"Why did you come to Windsor and lie to me, Honor?"

"'Twas but half a lie, and that's near the truth sometimes. Kitty would have married him if you hadn't gone to London, Dick. You know yourself that she would—and was it my fault that things fell out so? As God hears me, I had no more to do with it than Mistress Dulcimore herself!"

"But Harborne sent you, and you knew that he sent you?"

"Ah, Dick, and will you judge a woman when necessity drives her? Think what such as I meet with every day and all the days as we go through the world. Lord Harborne has been a friend to me. I owed it to him that I got my place at the theatre—but why speak of that? 'Twas a charity to save little Kitty from him; 'twas a kindness to you. Will you judge me for the means because I took a rough-and-ready road?"

"I am not judging you at all, Honor. You interest me. I am even inclined to think that you knew nothing of last night's work."

"Would I know anything of it, Dick? Why did he bring

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her here? That he might offer to marry her when all the rest of the world turned its back upon her. Ah, there's a mischief which would not have suited my book—to make opportunity for another. You were blind to think so, Sir Richard—if you think so, which I'll believe when I hear it."

"I have said that I am inclined to take another view. Would ye have me eloquent, Honor? Faith, 'tis no eloquence at all that I can command this morning."

"But, Dick, you surely don't intend to stay here?"

"What can I do—where would ye have me go? To Windsor, that every rat may point the finger at me and call me craven? To London, to whine to authority—and, Honor, what would my fellow-men say? Ah, there they have the advantage. If I blow my brains out, they'll say that some story of shame drove me to it. If I don't, they'll give the affair to the newspapers, and every man have the right to pass me in the street. Will ye be saying that Dick Escombe should put up with that now?"

"I can't, Dick—and that's the honest truth. The chaplain's talking of France. They'll hold their tongues if you go to France. My lord's the only one who doesn't fall in with it. He asks your life, Dick—you'll be a madman if you listen to him, and you know it."

"Then whose voice should persuade me?"

"Mistress Kitty's. Go to Windsor in spite of them. Go and ask her what you should do."

"A woman's answer—spoken in the house and not to the world!"

"And where should a woman's voice be heard if not in the house? Go to Kitty, Sir Dick. She has the first claim upon you. Will you destroy her happiness because my lord demands it? That would be great wickedness—ah,



Sir Richard Escombe

I know ye better than to think it of you, Sir Richard Escombe."

He laughed a little sadly.

"Is there a man in all the world less willing to die than I am at this moment, Honor? Show me a way out, and I will hang a rope of pearls about your neck. Tell me how I can have the advantage of this sorry crew of ruffians, and you shall be the best friend I ever had. Do you think that I fear them? God knows how little. But, Honor, they have caught me in a trap, and no wit of mine can open it. Let a woman try, then! Show me the way, and I will take it at the gallop."

She thought upon it a little while, and began presently to speak in a low tone, but very earnestly. Upon his part, Sir Richard listened patiently and encouraged her to proceed; but she had hardly come to the pith of it when she heard her name cried in the porch of the abbey, and instantly obeyed the summons.

"'Tis what I would have you do," she said, rising quickly and speaking with a wonderful animation, "and, Sir Dick, there is no other way. Your life or theirs—remember what I say to you."

XXXVII

THE CLUB RESOLVES



HERE were some twenty of the brethren, perhaps, to attend my Lord Harborne when he called a formal meeting of the Society of St. Francis toward one o'clock of the afternoon.

Held in the great refectory, still eloquent of last night's debauch—the tables littered with cards, the broken glasses still lying where they fell, tankards and bottles everywhere—there assembled the oddest committee meeting that clubland has ever known.

Sir Francis Dashwood, the founder of the society, was there, of course. My Lords Churchill and Ailsa, full of their curiosity; the fat fop Cunningham, seeking a good excuse to eat and drink; Whitwould the elegant and Whitehead the poetical—these would not be absent. As for Tobias Cambray, the chaplain, never had he cut a finer figure. The scheme he had hit upon seemed to make for the salvation of the club. Tobias was happy again.

There had been a little discussion upon the threshold of the refectory and significant talk had passed. For one thing, those two dismal rogues, Musgrove and Cockraine, who pretended that they had been scouring the country as far east as Windsor, came in with the false news that all was



Sir Richard Escombe

well; while even Captains Beddoe and Rupert turned up from the barracks to declare that not a whisper of the affair had been breathed at the castle. All these addressed Tobias in turn before he went to my lord, and sharp was the exchange of question and answer between them.

"You have ridden straight from Windsor?" the great man asked Captain Beddoe.

Beddoe replied that they had ridden as straight as Rupert's craving for liquor permitted.

"With such delays only as Beddoe's gross desire for food compelled," Rupert corrected.

"And there is no story abroad, gentlemen?"

"Not so much as a breath in an ale-house."

Tobias nodded his head pleasantly, and turned to Cockraine.

"And you?" he asked.

"Am as dry as the Sahara, reverence."

"You learned nothing in Marlow?"

"Nothing whatever. The old cat is asleep and the kitten in the basket. The house has all the air of it. You need not knock there. Kitty Dulcimore won't show to-day, reverence; I'll wager a hundred on it."

The poet Whitehead here intervened to speak of the sleep "that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care," but was still in the middle of a line when Whitwould the elegant asked them in all good faith if it were "last night or to-morrow morning," which provoked Churchill to the facetious retort that he might call it "the day before to-morrow." Which nonsense, we may remark, was typical of the levity which commonly characterized intercourse at Medmenham and could not be wholly laid aside even on such a morning.

"The sun has passed the meridian, it would be after-

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noon," Whitehead rambled on, and then he added the reflection that a decision must be come to before six hours had passed. "If Sir Richard Escombe is with us then," he said.

"But he will not be here. He will be in France," the chaplain interposed. "So much is arranged between my lords and myself. We are all for compromise, gentlemen—half measures, but large ones."

"And a French cut about the bottle. Well, I don't envy the man. Wine and women—and my brother Racine. No, I, a poet, could not envy Richard Escombe."

"This is certain," said Cunningham: "if Escombe goes to France, it will be resurrection to our noble friend."

"Spare him the shock," muttered Lord Churchill. "Think of the society."

"His recovery is as wonderful as his death would have been magnificent!" cried Ailsa; and then he repeated several times the pregnant words: "What a man, what a miracle of a man!"

"You may well say it, gentlemen—what a miracle of a man! He talks of being carried to London after the meeting—remember how beautifully he lay in sleep among us last night. Even I, Tobias, was moved. And I would tell you this: if His Lordship goes upon a journey some of us would be wise to imitate him. Medmenham will be no place for any of us after last night's work."

Musgrove, the bully, had just time to say that his destination was Belgium, where he intended to found a new religion, when Tobias drew the curtain back from the refectory door, and all entered with that measured step and anxious look necessary to a room wherein a sick man lies. My lord was here, propped up upon a monstrous scarlet



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couch, his body swathed in bandages, but his head bare, and grown so old in a single night that Time and not man might have crossed swords with him.

The men approached the couch warily, some feigning looks of deep sympathy, others turning their eyes away, lest they should be offended. When all were grouped about my lord, Tobias reminded them why they were assembled.

"We are here," he said, "to do His Lordship's pleasure, which is also our own. Gentlemen, if Richard Escombe leave this house without word or bond, no man's name henceforth is safe; there is no longer security within these walls. As you know, gentlemen, his life is forfeit to the club; yet whether it be wise to ask his life it is now our purpose to consider. And first I would remind you of the King's displeasure. We are not liked at Windsor. Evil tongues have made mention of us. I will not hold it from you that should another die as Mr. Fenton died, the very existence of our society may be threatened. That is why I come to you with an alternative as arranged between by Lords Ailsa and Churchill and myself. Gentlemen, we must punish Richard Escombe, but discretion must come to our aid. I doubt not that so much will be admitted by you all."

They assented to it with varying expressions. One or two would have made much of the King's known will, but my lord himself silenced them with uplifted hand and such a look as men remembered for many a long day.

"It lies upon our honor," he said, his face crimson with the effort of utterance—"it lies upon our honor. Why do you speak to me of discretion?"

"To save our necks," rejoined Cunningham, bluntly. "Is this affair anything to us? Have done with the cant

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of it, Harborne. You brought the girl here for your own pleasure. Are we to foot the bill? I'll have none of it for my part. Let the others hang if they will."

This, perchance, was the first time since Medmenham had been a club that any man had been bold enough to contradict my lord so flatly, and many ears were bent to such an unwonted note of defiance. As for Tobias, he could but spread his hands abroad and plead for patience, while my lord sank back upon the pillow as though strength to defend his case were denied him.

"You have no right to abrogate the rule," he whispered, hoarsely; "the penalty is for all—your honor commands you to defend me."

"My dear lord," cried Tobias, pompously, "be assured you shall not long complain of us. We know our duty and will do it; but ours is the better way. Let Richard Escombe go to France—we are safer for his absence. Let him go, and give a bond that he will not return until the club shall give him leave. There's the open door and no King's Dragoons to close it. Will it not suit your purpose better?—a thousand times I say that it will. In France the man is forgotten, dead; but in this country, though you kill him, you shall find him very much alive."

My lord made no response to this; but the others fell in with it as readily as they would have done with any proposition making for their own salvation.

"To France, as you say," Churchill remarked; "and when he is in France no word of last night's story must pass our lips. Let London understand that Richard Escombe was a defaulter among men of honor and fled the country upon his default. There is the story for Grub Street. I do not think my lord would have it mended."

Sir Richard Escombe

"And others will guard it jealously," said Ailsa, "for if the truth were known—"

"The truth!" says Cunningham. "What have we to do with the truth? Gentlemen, if truth were the fashion, God help us and society. Summon Sir Richard without further delay. The chaplain has the resolution, and will read it. I do not think any one here can propose an amendment, but if he can we will hear him readily."

He waited for Tobias, who had seated himself at a table near the great red couch, and now spread a thin blue paper before him and put on monstrous spectacles. The chaplain loved such an hour as this. It was meat and drink to him.

"Here are the words," he began—"that Sir Richard Escombe, having defaulted to the club upon a point of personal honor, is hereby expelled from the Society of St. Francis.' If any gentleman has anything to propose—"

He looked about him expectantly, and perceived perhaps a little indifference, which was but human. These men had been fearful an hour ago that Escombe would blow his brains out in their midst. Now, however, when it had become but mere banishment to France, the proceedings interested them but ill. The odd part of the affair lay in their assumption that such a man as Richard Escombe would accept their clemency. No one seems to have doubted it.

"He will leave to-day," says Cunningham.

"And the story will be in the sheets to-morrow," added Churchill.

"While we," said Sir Francis Dashwood, "have but to communicate our resolution to him to make an end of the matter."

Sir Richard Escombe

My lord was too weak to dissent now, and he watched them with half-closed eyes; but others cried, "Yes, yes, let's have the man in"; and all rising and waiting expectantly, Sir Richard himself presently entered the room and bowed in his old manner to the assembled company.

"Gentlemen," he said, "your servant."

This, surely, was a fateful hour in the story of the club at Medmenham. Depict that scene in the old refectory of the abbey—the great crimson couch whereon my lord lies, pale and ghastly, and with half-closed eyes; the grouped gallants about him, their clothes disordered, their eyes bloodshot, many of them showing tousled hair no longer hidden by powder or peruke; the glorious sunshine of the autumn afternoon; the Norman arch and Gothic window; the impress everywhere in stone and glass of that primitive faith which had known but one flock and one Shepherd. And alone, as a prisoner before his judges, Sir Richard Escombe, soldier and lover, to battle for his life and the woman he loved. Small wonder that history has underlined the page; small wonder that Medmenham can speak first of it even in our own day.

Sir Richard, they say, had never carried himself to better advantage. Dressed as he had been last night, the glory of the day seemed to have endowed him with a new gift of vigor and of youth. He wore a smile upon his handsome face; his step was light and easy; he carried his left hand lightly upon the hilt of his sword, and laid his right hand upon his heart, with just a touch of mockery in the gesture, when he bowed to them. Perhaps they understood that he was still their master. It cannot be denied that his presence was powerful to provoke them anew to anger.

"Gentlemen, your servant. My lords and gentlemen, I

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am here according to my oath. Say what is your pleasure."

They knew that he derided them, and yet had no answer. Lord Harborne alone, raising himself with a costly effort, met his enemy's gaze unflinchingly, and mumbled again of the penalty.

"Sir Richard Escombe knows our rule—why does he ask us what it is?"

"Yes, yes," echoed many voices, for thus swiftly did the mood toward him change. "Sir Richard knows the rule; the rest is with him."

So they taunted him, while in Richard Escombe's eyes there flashed a thought which no man among them might truly read.

Had they but known the torture of the doubt he suffered—to be at the mercy of such rogues; his honor in their keeping; his life at their disposal! And he believed that they meant to have his [life. All the chaplain's fine plotting and planning went by the board directly the old mocking enemy stood among them. God, how they had flinched, every one of them, when the Dick Escombe of old time turned upon them! And how much they owed him of hate and shame ill paid! This was their hour—why should prudence intervene, to say nothing of that raw blunderer Tobias Cambray, perpetually prating of King George and the Dragoons?

"Brethren," cries Tobias, fallen again to the old manner of speaking in his excitement—"brethren, I doubt not that Sir Richard Escombe has come here to throw himself upon our clemency and to offer us his most humble apologies."

"Nay, nay," gasps my lord, "we can show no clemency

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—I claim the penalty. This man has offended; let him say why he should not suffer."

Others echoed his words, hate encouraged by his persistency. For many minutes there were mutterings of "the rule, the rule"; even the more discreet were carried away. And through it all there was Sir Richard Escombe smiling quietly upon them, and waiting his opportunity to speak.

"Gentlemen," says he, at last, making himself heard with difficulty, "I have asked you. What is your pleasure? You answer me that 'tis the rule. Shall I call it a rule made by drunkards for the salvation of their vices? Shall I name it a jest of rogues in a house of rogues, the cowardice of villains who draw sword but upon cowards? Nay, that would come home too closely to you all. Ye have trapped me by your laws, and I am here to pay the uttermost farthing, gentlemen—even to this."

He took a step forward toward my lord's couch and drew a pistol from his pocket. So unexpected was the movement, so prettily timed in its dramatic effect, that men already imagined the weapon pointed against his forehead and heard the report of it echo in the room. Here in an instant the whole meaning and possible consequence of their hate made themselves manifest. They could depict Richard Escombe prone upon the floor, could see themselves riding headlong for London, could hear already the rumor in the City and palace. Let this man die at Medmenham, and to-morrow the King would accuse them. Who shall wonder at their *volte face*, their sudden, almost mad, desire to stay Escombe's hand?"

"Not here, by God!" cried Ailsa.

Many echoed the words. One roared: "Damn him, he'll blow his brains out!" Then they turned to the

Sir Richard Escombe

chaplain. Lord, how white he was! almost as ghastly a spectacle as my lord, who sat bolt-upright, his fevered eyes upon Richard Escombe's face, the purpose of the years expressed in that yearning look which cried mutely for Richard Escombe's death.

Ah, if the trigger had but fallen! My lord watched it as other men watch the dice-box or the card about to be turned. His parched lips tried to utter an exclamation, but failed him. He could have struck old Tobias when that worthy raised his voice in a pitiful appeal, spoken from his very heart.

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen! If you please!" roared Tobias. "Sir Richard Escombe! I implore you, gentlemen, there must be no scandal at Medmenham. What I have to say—"

They received him with shouts of "Order! Order!" For many minutes the babel was indescribable. And through it all Sir Dick stood unmoved, a cocked pistol in his hand, the same kindly smile upon his face. He was quite willing to listen to Tobias. The chaplain had no more attentive auditor when at last he obtained a hearing.

"Gentlemen," says he, speaking more calmly now, "Sir Richard, by his presence here, admits the gravity of that offence of which our society has found him guilty. The rule has been broken. We are forbidden, under pain of death, to draw sword upon one another in the name of woman; Sir Richard has done that, and honor would demand that he pay the penalty, as my lord has said. But we, gentlemen, we are not such implacable friends of tradition as some would make us out. I say that we can show clemency upon occasion, and that to-day is such an occasion. In your name, I tell Sir Richard Escombe that if he will leave this kingdom of England to-day—"



Sir Richard Escombe

They took it up with a swing, interrupting the chaplain at his most eloquent period.

"Yes, yes," they cried; "let him leave the country!"

"If he will do that, gentlemen, if he will consider that he can do no less in the circumstances in which he has placed himself, then I say that we make no further demand upon him, that our society is vindicated, and Mr. Wilkes's prudence amply justified. Let Sir Richard answer to us. Hear him in patience, I beg of you."

He raised his hands aloft, swept them about in a mighty gesture, and then, folding them behind his back, appeared to wait for Sir Richard's answer as one who was quite sure of it. As for the others, not a man among them was aware of Honor Marwood's revelation. None believed that the proposal would come otherwise than as a surprise to the victim of their cunning, and they were astonished enough at the immutable sang froid he now displayed.

"Ye have spoken, sir, and I have heard ye," he began, addressing the chaplain particularly; "take now my answer, and do not ask another. I will not ride a mile, not one, by my soul! at the dictation of such a crew as this. I will not leave my country though a kingdom awaited me across the water. Ye hear me all"—and now he turned to the assembled brethren—"ye hear me when I say that I come among you to pay this penalty to the uttermost farthing. Gentlemen, I am here to die because better men than you have jested with the name of woman. Such is my unalterable purpose. I came with the night, and into the night will I go. Think you that honor is less to me than to those who prate of it so loudly? Gentlemen, has fortune been so kind to me that I should wish to live? Has life so much in store that I should fear death? You know that it has



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not. A vagrant of fortune, shall I complain if fortune brings me to my own, even in such a house of infamy as this? Nay, I will not complain of it at all."

He dwelt upon the words, pausing for a brief moment as though his very soul were speaking for him. Then, as upon some superb impulse of a mind which resented that very fortune to whom he had appealed, he advanced a step toward them and lifted the pistol up that all might see.

"You ask my life," he said; "you shall have it—here in your midst where you can cover the dead with your pall of lies, here where my lord can boast of his victory, here where ye trapped an honest woman, and have still the light of her purity shining upon your besotted faces. Is death aught to me? A moment of fire and a man's agony—a look from glassy eyes to the eyes of those who see—light as of heaven and darkness as of hell—the unknown, and afterward the God who shall judge between us—is that death or life? Would ye linger on to the dotard's end, or by a flash take from eternity that which eternity has to give? Gentlemen, you think that I fear to die. You shall know the truth; you shall bear witness, all."

Emotion, a true apprehension of his own desperate situation, perhaps the memory of all that might have been between Kitty and himself, made his eloquence very real on Richard Escombe's part. He saw no way of escape. Honor had trapped him; we may not doubt that it would have carried him even to the end, and that he had fallen there, a dead man among them as he threatened, but for that which followed immediately, even in the moment of his last frenzied words to them.

"Death's a jest!" he shouted, laughing as he spoke—"a jest you played at yesterday; Death's a jest—the best jester



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of you all, a gambler in the dark, the master of the cards—he knows—he knows."

He raised the pistol; the men hung breathlessly upon his words, almost afraid to move. And then he knew, Richard Escombe knew; and, dropping the weapon to his side, he waited for those who should tell him that Kitty Dulcimore had come to Medmenham, and that he would hear her voice again, were it but once before the end.

XXXVIII

THE KING RETURNS



ND what of our phlegmatic friend, the Marquis of Repton, during these eventful hours? Repton, as we remember, had carried Kitty to her aunt's house at Marlow, and thence, believing himself to be a very wise man, had ridden straight home to bed.

"Escombe will never make a fool of himself," he argued. "The others have too much love of their own carcasses to play any tricks upon him. As for old Nobbs, he don't want to fight. Why should I trouble myself, then? The girl's a bit hysterical, but she'll sleep it off. A damned wicked business to take her to such a place. They'll make a fine story for the town—but what's that matter, now that Escombe and she have been cuddling again? Trust Dick to cut the heads of any weeds she may bring away. I'll go and sleep on it. Good Lord, what a poor sort of a monk I am making!"

He returned to Windsor, and went to bed without delay. Awake at an early hour next morning, and having the devil to pay in the shape of an irate Colonel, who asked where and why and how so many officers came to be absent, Repton was returning to his rooms about half-past eleven, when whom should he stumble upon but Barry, Escombe's man, and right glad he was to see him.

Sir Richard Escombe

"Hello, Barry, and what's the news of Sir Richard?"

Barry wore a doleful mien. He had been refused admittance to the club, then told that his master had returned to Windsor. Not a wink of sleep had he known that night, devil a bar had he played on the poor old flute.

"Ay, sorr, and what would the news be? My master's still with the wild men at Medmenham."

"Not come back, Barry?"

"No more home than I am, bad cess to the tongue that compels me to say it. Shall I tell the ladies that? 'Tis yourself that will be knowing how troublesome the women can be when you ask 'em to be men. Well, they're here. The old one speaks in five sharps. Ye can hear her for yourself, and no kettledrum louder—"

"Ladies, Barry—what ladies?"

Repton had not the least idea to what the man referred.

"The Misses Dulcimore—leastwise, they should be that, though one's old enough to have buried three. They're here asking aferher my master; and me telling stories that would shame the Dean in the pulpit. Ay, they think he's come home, when, d'ye see, there's nothing but pillows in his bed, and the devil himself couldn't wake 'em."

"Do you tell me that the ladies are in Windsor?"

"Ay, at the inn with a bottle of wine between 'em and a little soldier boy to show 'em the sights. I'll be going down there presently, when I've cooked Sir Richard's breakfast. 'Tis myself that would be ashamed to see no one 'ating of it."

Repton smiled, and went upon his way. He had almost reached his own quarters when one of his own Dragoons came running after him, to say that the King desired to see him immediately.

Sir Richard Escombe

"But," says he, "I thought His Majesty had ridden over to the lake?"

"He did, sir, but returned immediately. He is now with my Lord Suffolk in his privy apartment. You are to go there at once."

Repton rarely speculated about the future, and he did not speculate now, when he crossed the Lower Ward and made his way reflectively toward the private apartments. If any thought occurred to him, it would be that the King had heard a report of the officers' delinquencies, and had something emphatic to say about it. And this view seemed to be justified when a nimble-toed wand-bearer conducted him through the antechamber and into Soldier George's own cabinet. To be sure, His Majesty was mighty angry. Repton had never seen such a look on his face before.

"I have sent for you, Marquis, to speak of last night. Were you of those who were absent this morning?"

"Pardon me, Your Majesty; not absent this morning."

"But you were at the club at Medmenham—you will not deny it?"

"No, sir; I am unable to deny that."

"And you are aware of what has happened to Sir Richard Escombe?"

"But little, sir. I was received into the society as a novice last night. Afterward I went to change my clothes. Your Majesty has heard something of the mockeries practised at the abbey. I was not present in the room when Sir Richard took part in them."

"Of that I am very glad, Marquis. It will so be easier for you to do my will and pleasure. Some of my soldiers, I trust, have better occupations than to assemble together

Sir Richard Escombe

to insult a pretty lady. Tell me that you knew nothing of Miss Dulcimore's misfortune."

"Upon my honor, sir, not a word. Had I known of it—"

"Had you known of it you would have done that which I shall command you to do now. It is to ride with a troop of Dragoons to this Medmenham Abbey, to enter in my name, and to bring here—dead or alive, Marquis—those who are threatening the life of my friend Sir Richard Escombe."

Repton was much astonished. He knew nothing, we must recollect, of Sir Richard's situation. Had he known he would not have quitted the abbey. The fracas he witnessed was just such a brawl as he looked to see at Medmenham. A mere neophyte, he knew nothing of the rules—could not anticipate what must follow upon Sir Richard's boldness. So his astonishment was very real when the King spoke to him.

"We shall ride immediately, Your Majesty; I was not aware—"

"That much I do understand; no soldier insults a pretty lady and remains to wear my coat. Go immediately, Marquis. Let them be rooted out like vermin, all who are threatening the life of my friend Sir Richard Escombe. Do not return to me until you bring news of his safety. I send you in my name. You will speak of the King in all that you do."

His Majesty meant every word of it; no one who heard him could doubt it. If he had seemed indifferent when Kitty Dulcimore appealed to him on the Broad Walk, his ignorance of the English tongue would answer for that. He had not understood her. It needed the passable Ger-

Sir Richard Escombe

man of my Lord-who-could-generally-make-himself-understood Suffolk to bring the truth to the royal ear. Ay, and then what a *volte face*—what a tempest of rage and anger and fine moral platitudes!

Let us call Soldier George no humbug. He was a vicious man, but his vices were those of a gentleman. This club at Medmenham seemed to him beyond the pale of social toleration. He would have none of it at any price.

“They are not my soldiers who go there; they are not my friends,” he said, in German. “Much is permitted to those who are much tempted, but, my lord, these men have no excuse. I have warned them already; I have made my displeasure known. The Hell Fire Club is a club of scoundrels. I will hunt them out like rats; there shall not be left one stone of the house standing. And should my friend Sir Richard Escombe come to harm there, they shall be tried for murder, even if they were my own brothers.”

The command to the Marquis of Repton followed naturally enough; and upon it the bugle note in the barracks, the order “boot and saddle,” the stir in the town, and lastly—but this we would never call the least important—the sudden appearance of Barry before Kitty at the inn, and the astonishing tidings that good fellow carried to Mistress Kitty herself.

“Whist!” he said, by way of introduction, “’tis Barry Michigan that plays the flute to Sir Richard himself. Would ye have the news from over yonder?”

Kitty knew Barry well; she remembered him from the days of her childhood, and, naturally, there was that halo about him which love can create for all who serve one beloved. When he came to the inn, it was as though some

Sir Richard Escombe

old friend stood suddenly before her, and not for all the gold in England would she have denied her pleasure.

“Oh, Barry, Barry, how glad I am!”

“And the redcoats not so pleased. ‘Tis to Medmenham they’re riding, the fools. Have not I cooked his breakfast, and will he not be coming home to ate it now?”

“Barry, Barry, then how do you know?”

“What’s there to be knowing that my own head cannot tell me?”

“He fought with my lord, Barry; they will ask his life—the life of your master, Sir Richard.”

“Ay, ‘tis that same effrontery they would have. Will ye be telling me that he’s still in the wild man’s sty?”

“He is at Medmenham, in danger. Could we not go there, Barry—you and I? He is in danger, and has need of us. Shall we leave him alone?”

“But the soldiers—ay, damnation, I should know the redcoats better! They’ll be a week on the road. Glory be to God for your pretty face—could ye sit upon a horse if I found one?”

“Barry, would I go to the world’s end with you, if it were to save him!”

“Then we’ll be upon the way before a man can say ‘halt.’ ‘Tis a pity the breakfast is cooking; but, d’ye see, he’ll be ating it when we bring him home. Ay, mistress, ye wouldn’t be keeping me here with my master away?”

“Not one minute, Barry; not one precious instant.”

“Then I’ll go whistling the horses, and God send no weedy ones. Do you whisper in the ould man’s ear a word about the riding. He’ll be understanding what you’re afther, and has daughters of his own. Ay, mistress, ‘tis time we were starting, surely.”

Sir Richard Escombe

Kitty made no other answer than to run away at once and search out mine host's daughter. Her talk with Barry had been wild enough. Indeed, the pair of them were plainly distracted, and hardly knew what they were saying. But behind it all lay a sure purpose. They would go to Medmenham and tell the great news. The Dragoons were riding out. Salvation was upon the road. Ah, what news it must be—if it were not too late; if Salvation rode no lagging horse!

And that dear old thing, Aunt Elizabeth.

What a crying shame to leave her there in the inn, believing that the King's equerries were about to summon her, and that she would presently courtesy before a golden throne!

XXXIX

THE SUMMONS



ANY in the great refectory at Medmenham heard the sound of fracas at the gate—many stood to ask what it meant.

And this was the message which stayed the hand of Richard Escombe when the tragic jest might have carried him God knows to what lengths.

Ay, what music to troubled ears—and yet how shallow a hope which that same music inspired! He heard his servant's voice—he knew that Barry stood without—inspiration almost divine told him that a second horse would carry Kitty Dulcimore. Hope had treated him shabbily if it were otherwise; but he could ask, none the less, if this were well or ill—a boon conferred or a desire mocked. And while he thought upon it, Barry spoke again.

"'Tis I, Barry Michigan, who says that the lady spakes truth. Will ye be looking me in the face? Bad cess to your owl's blarney; 'tis myself that would shut your eyes for a shilling and go dancing without the change. Stand aside, ye May-pole, and let the lady in."

And upon that high words—and again a retort, and then an angry altercation—and so a little patter of light feet down the corridor and the curtain drawn, and Kitty herself, with blazing eyes, standing bravely before them all.

Sir Richard Escombe

"Sir Richard—gentlemen!" she cried; and there was that in her voice which brought the blood to many a face and whispered shame in many an ear. No judge could have accused these men as that girlish figure, as those dancing blue eyes, as that head thrown back and hand up-raised in scorn.

"Sir Richard—gentlemen!"

My lord raised himself up on the couch, they say, and regarded her narrowly. All the old desire of possession, the mad lust after her, the rancor, the hate, came to his help in that moment and gave strength to his trembling limbs.

"Who let this woman enter here?" he asked them.

It was a question that Kitty herself made haste to answer.

"I came, as I have a right to come," said she. "Am I not of your fraternity, my lord? Does the society shut its doors upon its own? You put the habit upon me—behold, I am come to wear it in your midst."

They liked her spirit, and more than one, forgetting the circumstances of her intrusion, cried "Hear!" As for old Tobias, he was as a man just awakened from a hostile sleep. All the tension of the scene which should have culminated in Richard Escombe's death snapped when he heard Kitty's voice. And so it was with the others. They began to come down to earth again. Staring eyes, which had watched the pistol's barrel ten seconds ago as though it were human and would avenge the insult, now turned to the face of the beautiful woman and searched it curiously. Why had Kitty Dulcimore come to them? And had she come alone?

"Lady," said the chaplain, at last, "we do not deny your right. Please to say what you ask of us?"

She did not hesitate, not for a single instant. Stepping

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boldly before them, the head raised, the white neck poised as though an artist had been her counsellor, a flash of crimson in her cheeks, a woman's purpose in her eyes, she harkened to Tobias and gave him his answer.

"The safety of Sir Richard Escombe—I am here to demand it!"

And then, with fine scorn, of which none was a better mistress, she began to accuse them.

"Oh, am I ignorant of the reasons which brought him here? Gentlemen, do you think the story of this shameful house is hidden from me? Could it be so from one who has been your guest? I am here, and I know. Let Sir Richard Escombe go free, say that all claim upon his honor is satisfied, and my lips are forever sealed. My lord, do you answer me, since this concerns you closely. Tell Sir Richard that all has been forgotten. My lord, tell him that it was a jest."

She extended her hands toward the couch, almost as an advocate pleading before a throne of justice. This was milk and honey to my lord. Often had Kitty Dulcimore mocked him. She would weep hot tears to-night — she would repay him even yet.

"The issue," says he, with some calmness, "is with Sir Richard Escombe. We ask nothing of him at all. The obligations of honor are entirely his own."

The men liked the turn of this, pleased that her wit should be awakened by refusal, but chiefly anxious to know if argument had any other resource but words. Indeed, Old Tobias appears to have been overmuch encouraged by my lord's words and to have seconded him with rare animation.

"Yes, yes," cried he. "As His Lordship says, we ask

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nothing. If Sir Richard will quit the country the story of last night's work shall never be told by us. So much, lady, has already been intimated to him."

He looked at Escombe, who was still smiling, but with such a meaning behind it all, such anxiety of every word spoken and implied, that even his great courage was shaken by that ordeal. Ah, if Kitty had but known what her words meant to him! Even a lover's eloquence might fail to tell her that.

"The club has been generous," my lord went on. "I will even say that it is about to be too generous at this lady's appeal. We will give Sir Richard Escombe twelve hours. If he be in England at the end of that time, it will unfortunately have to be made known that he is a defaulter among men of honor."

"Yes, yes," they all cried, "give him twelve hours!" And again the searching eyes were turned curiously upon Kitty as she looked at her lover and spoke to them in his name.

"And to all this, Sir Richard says?" she asked them, calmly.

"They have my answer, lady—I stay in England."

A mocking laugh from some hidden coward greeted the open defiance. One or two of those present shrugged their shoulders disdainfully and aped looks of contempt, to which their attitude gave no dignity. All seemed to feel that it was the instant of crisis. Ah, this pretty woman, how she was about to be humbled before them! There would be tears, of course—and protestations, perhaps, at the very foot of my lord's couch. Surely his hurt was worth this. And would not Escombe suffer with her? Old John Wilkes had been a wise man when he drew the rule. Harborne himself could not have set a prettier snare.

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Now, Kitty heard the men to the end; she witnessed their grimaces, eyes raised to heaven, shrugs and sinister gestures; and then—and this as a resounding blow upon their curious eyes—she threw the cloak of a woman's timidity aside and began to speak plainly to them. Never had the Hell Fire Club heard such a message; never would it hear another of the kind from a woman's lips.

"You will tell Sir Richard's story!" she cried, her eyes aflame and her breast heaving. "My lord, there will be another told, and not by your lips. For here's a tale for the King's ear, and at Windsor shall men recite it—the story of His Majesty's officers who lured a woman to this house; the story of those who claim a man's life as the price of their dishonor. And so I would begin with that. I have ridden hard, my lord, that I might come to you before others who will deal less lightly with you. I have come to ask you to do of your own free will that which the King will command you to do less gently and in a tone to which you shall be ashamed to lend your ears. Sirs, I know your names. When I was in your midst last night, when a woman's need won no pity, think you that I forgot to ask myself of those who put this shame upon me? A child would have done as much, and I am no child. Sir Francis Dashwood, you who founded this society; Lord Ailsa, whom good-fortune alone has kept from the prison; Lord Churchill, whom women name as a leper in any house you honor; Mr. Cunningham, who is beneath even a lackey's contempt—was it not of you that my friends have spoken to the King this morning? Sirs, if it please you, then, let my messenger go back to Windsor. Let him say that His Majesty's pleasure is nothing to you. Let him carry the news of all that has been done here—let him say

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that there is one masquerading as a priest among you and that he is the greatest rogue of you all. My lord, and gentlemen, this is my message. Please do give me your answer to it."

It was a beautiful thing to watch the girl, an exquisite pleasure to one at least in the room to hear the tones of that silvery voice attuned to such a mood of noble courage. Kitty knew that she pleaded for Sir Richard's very life; and all her sincerity, all her great love and hope, were expressed in the earnest words which so accused them.

And remember the cleverness of it all! No threat uttered. Nothing yet of a harsher story, nothing of Repton on the march, or of what the King had said to him. Simply an appeal to men who once had known a finer code of honor if not of morals. And for her proudest auditor, Richard Escombe himself; his eyes upon her own in burning pride; his heart throbbing at every phrase, so sure of her, so strong in her love that death itself no longer had been a pain.

So much Sir Richard could conceal from none. Evil eyes watched him, evil tongues whispered apart, but every man there must bend to the truth, even my lord above the others. Ah, listen to Frederick Viscount Harborne as he wrestles still with fate, his voice grown hoarse, his arm numbed, scarce able now to lift a finger of scorn or claim silence for his protest.

"Gentlemen, if you please," he said, "are we to be governed by a woman, then? Are we to be threatened by every gossip who runs to the King with her tale? What do you fear? Sir Richard has taken the oath and broken it. Are we hostages to the King for this man's honor? Let His Majesty tell me so, and I will speak."

The defiance astonished them. They liked the turn of

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it, and applauded my lord. Even the fat fop Cunningham could remember what he owed to a cynical tongue and that it had lately become idle.

"The King will listen to a woman if she be pretty enough," said he; and then, with a drawl, he asked: "What story does the lady propose to tell?"

"Yes, yes," from many voices; "what story will she tell?"

"She claimed our hospitality, the King must know that."

"Will he charge us with this man's cowardice?"

"Does she say that Sir Richard Escombe is afraid?"

The questions rained upon her. Men laughed and threatened in a breath; after all, she might have been put up to this and have no more intention of going to Windsor than to the moon. They began to take new courage. Let Escombe leave the country, and it did not matter what scandal followed. My lord perceived this, and he it was who asked the question, "Will the King charge us with this man's cowardice?"—a taunt which brought the blood to Sir Richard's cheek and a new light to Kitty's eyes.

"I will answer for Sir Richard," she said, proudly; and then, raising a white arm aloft and bidding them listen, she cried: "Oh, I come not to you unarmed; I fear you not, men of intellect and the arts, for the King himself is my advocate and that is his voice speaking to you."

None knew what she meant; none for a moment understood her. The old jests, the whispered asides, the easy mockery attended her response and would have prevailed but for old Tobias, whose ear was keener, whose instinct of fear better trained than their own. Tobias plainly had taken alarm. If not, why that bent ear, the sudden pallor of the face, the hand uplifted? Men beheld him thus, and cried "hush"—a phrase was broken upon my lord's lips—

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a great stillness came upon the place. And then, as a sound afar, they heard it—the rolling drum, faint upon the air as a murmur of the clouds, but the drum.

“God,” cries some one, “the Dragoons are out!”

Be sure their ears were keen enough now! Shuffling feet, white faces, and muttered whispers confessed the reality of that alarm. The Dragoons were out. The King had been warned, then! And this woman carried his message, as she said. But for Richard Escombe there were villains among them who would have struck her where she stood. Well they understood what Soldier George would have to say—well they knew what this would mean to them. The rolling drum was as a call to judgment. They could hear already the thunder of the public accusation.

And what a round-about when the truth was understood! Men would have gone upon their knees to Richard Escombe now to beg his clemency. The rule! Damnation take the rule, they said. Why did the man waste his time on words? Would he fill their cup to the brim? Cursed be the smile on his handsome face. And listen to him while he still talks of obedience—with the rolling drum upon the road and the Dragoons at a canter.

“You have heard this lady,” said he, just as though nothing whatever had happened in the between time—“you have heard this lady and you have heard me. What I said to you was my unalterable conviction. I have come to this place to-day because the laws of your society demanded that I should submit. 'Tis odd, maybe, to speak of any laws at all in such a house as this, but laws ye have and the better for being broken—but still your laws. I bow to them and to my destiny. Should the King ask for me—”

They interrupted him with a roar of protest.

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"No, no, we recall it, we abrogate the law," they bawled, while the chaplain, mad in a frenzy of fear, grovelled where erstwhile he had ruled.

"Sir Richard Escombe—in the name of us all, circumstances over which we have no knowledge—death and damnation! Will ye not let me speak? Circumstances over which—null and void—Sir Richard Escombe—"

They drowned his voice in a howl of protest. One great cry of "Agreed" must have been heard even by the Dragoons marching to the accusation. It was pitiful to see these men, who cut so fine a figure over the wine and the tables last night, running hither, thither, as rats in a cage, some bawling for their horses, others abasing themselves before Sir Richard—all set upon one purpose of salvation for the very man they had derided but an hour ago. And he, in turn, had but one answer for them—he charged them now, his voice was like a trumpet-blast in the room.

"Ye have music in your voices," he said, blandly, "but my ears are ill-trained to the note. Consent, say ye? By Heaven, no! You shall pay the uttermost farthing. You made the law, and by the law shall you stand or fall. Let the King judge between us. None shall charge my honor as you charge it and go unanswered. None, I say to you—"

Did he mean it, or was it but a subterfuge, a delightful comedy played upon a drama that had been very real? Who may answer that? If Sir Dick listened to them now, helped them to turn back the Captain of the Dragoons with a good excuse, would their tongues be kinder to him tomorrow, would they cease to hold the advantage over him? He did not believe it. The rats were caged, but the dogs must be let loose. And here stood perplexity. By what logic chopping could he contrive a quittance? He knew

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no more than the dead. He could not look at Kitty as one who would say: "I must go on. My honor forbids me to draw back." And she understood him. Her heart grew sick for him. She doubted if she could save him even now, at the eleventh hour.

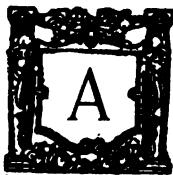
"I will not hear you," he ran on, thrusting the suppliant figures from him and dealing with the chaplain as though he had been a dog. "What! to have the tale told in every coffee-house, by every villain of your company—to hear you say: 'He was afraid. Richard Escombe was afraid?' Are the King's wishes aught to me when such things can be said? Let the law stand—let it run to the end."

"For the love of God!" Tobias cried, "Sir Richard, hear reason. The rule is null and void. I say null and void. It does not exist. Do you not hear the Dragoons upon the road? Hark to that! By God above us, if you persist there will be those who hang as high as Haman before the week has run! Will you turn upon your brethren? God forbid! Would you have the soldiers in?"

He wrung his hands, turning here and there and seeing but staring eyes before him. All could hear the tramp of the Dragoons upon the road. Then the great bell of Medmenham rang thrice and instantly a hush fell—for this was the summons which must find every man ready.

XL

THERE IS AN ALTERNATIVE



HUSH fell upon the room, but did not long endure. Tobias, driven to an extremity of fear, commanded that the outer gate should be barred, forgetting that Medmenham Abbey could be entered by resolute men through half a dozen gates. As for the others, they drew aside together in a little group about my lord's couch and began to speak in whispers. And then, and then only, Kitty ran to Sir Richard's side.

How many months had passed since she had spoken as her heart would speak to the Dick she loved! That fateful visit to London, the trick they had played upon him at Northumberland House, the visit to Brighton, and the shame they had put upon her—she could recall these episodes as in a flash of the memory and ask what fruit must come of them. Inscrutable, indeed, this lover of hers, who now regarded her with wan eyes, yet so gently and with so much kindness in every gesture that she would gladly have laid her head upon his breast and there have buried all the past in one glad moment of repentance and of sweet confession. Circumstance forbade her any such haven of her love. She could but creep close to Dick and speak a swift word to him.

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"Dick, what is it that keeps you here?"

"A rogue's trap, Kitty, and the key I cannot find."

"Has not the King sent me to you?"

"Can any king, then, seal their lips? Would you have them crying the story to all the town to-morrow? Shall I be able to answer that?"

"If a woman's love cannot answer it, Sir Richard."

"Ay, 'twould be the sweetest story in the world—"

"And if it be not told—if I go to the King—?"

"Say to him that the way was dark—I could see no light anywhere. Will ye tell the King that, Kitty?"

"Oh, Dick, Dick, for God's sake, hear reason—"

"I am all ears, sweet Kitty, as those gentlemen yonder. See how ill they dance to the music. 'Tis the Marquis of Repton, surely, and the Dragoons at the gate. Let him speak for me. He has a voice that a man should hear—"

"But, Dick, when I tell you—"

"You can tell me nothing, sweetheart, that my love does not surely tell me, and ye hear them. 'Tis a way of knocking they have when the house will not open. Let Repton speak. He may bring good news even yet—"

He stepped back, for the scene moved him strangely. Clearly to be perceived now in the gardens and the glades were the scarlet-coated Dragoons, dismounted from their horses and approaching the house as though it had been a fort. The great door itself resounded to the heavy blows upon it. Then a voice was heard, the curtain of the *sanc-tum sanctorum* fell back, and the Marquis of Repton stood before the company.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I am here in the King's name."

The men drew closer together, some feeling for their swords, one or two laughing foolishly. As for my lord, he

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lay back upon the great crimson couch muttering as one in a frenzy those words he had never forgotten from the beginning: "The penalty!" Should Richard Escombe escape him—he who stood already in the valley of the shadow of death? And was this the end of that house of infamy where so many scenes of his eventful life had been played? Were the walls to be stripped, the doors thrown open to the world? Such a man as he could plainly perceive with what little skill he had played his cards against so redoubtable an antagonist. Desire for revenge had almost given place to helpless submission to destiny. Richard Escombe seemed to mock him as he lay. A sense of failure irredeemable abased him utterly. Good God, that men should tell of such a death and such a victory!

"Gentlemen," says the Marquis, very bluntly, "I am here at the King's command—either to learn that Sir Richard Escombe is satisfied with the treatment he has met with at your hands or to carry you all to Windsor. Let Sir Richard first answer me."

He turned to Escombe, silencing with a gesture some who would have put in their word. And he was answered as swiftly.

"I leave this club," said Sir Richard, quietly, "when the rule permits me to do so."

"The King knows nothing of rules, Sir Richard. Is that your final word, sir?"

"My final word."

"Then, gentlemen, according to my orders—"

He turned to summon the soldiers in. The moment was tragical enough. Shall we wonder that Tobias, the chaplain, suddenly found his tongue and spoke almost triumphantly. Fool that he had been—ignoramus and a blun-

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derer; he who should have recited the creed of Medmenham without a trip.

"One moment, for God's sake, sir," cried he—"one moment that I may speak to Sir Richard Escombe before any step is taken that both he and His Majesty might regret!"

"I will give you exactly five minutes," says Repton; and upon that he turned about and left the room.

And what had the portly Tobias to say when he was gone? Picture him searching the pages of the great book as though some treasure of a line were buried there and monstrous hands must unearth it. Had not a glimmering of an idea come to Tobias—a flash in a dull cranium; the memory of something that had happened and been forgotten long ago, but, being remembered, might make for their salvation.

"Gentlemen," he protested, at last, the beads of perspiration rolling down his fat face, his hands trembling with excitement, "Brother Whitwould has whispered something in my ear which should have been said an hour ago. The rule of which we speak was amended after Mr. Fenton's death; circumstance has brought the fact to my recollection this very moment. There is, gentlemen, an alternative."

So here it was, then. Here was the splendid secret which could bring men to attention once more, recall my lord from his frenzy, set Kitty's heart beating. An alternative to their infamous rule. Twenty voices greeted the intimation with ringing shout. Even the Dragoons without were made to understand that their opportunities would be few.

"Read it, chaplain—for God's sake!"

"Out with it, old Tobias!"

"The alternative."

"Read it, man."

He climbed to the rostrum, pushed back now to an ob-

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scure corner. For a brief instant his face wore just such an expression as had passed over it last night in the more exquisite moments of his authority. Odd that in this crisis the old habits should sit so easily upon Tobias Cambrey; and yet we remember that the abbey was his very home, its life his life, its salvation his salvation. And there he stood, for the last time, the Master of the Revels, the chaplain of monstrous rites, telling the cowed group about him in what manner they might escape the King's displeasure.

"There is an alternative, as I say, brethren. When Mr. Fenton, a man of honor, submitted to the misfortune he himself had brought upon our society, there were some who considered our rule should be amended. We desire nothing but the welfare of this community. We would hinder no man's lawful pleasure or set ourselves up as any man's judge. The very words we write above our portals are witnesses to that: *Fay ce que voudras.* Let your pleasure be your own, but stand between no man and his intention—unless, brethren—and this brings me to the point of it—unless you shall be of a mind to marry the lady before twenty-four hours have passed. That is Mr. Wilkes's own provision. I will confess that I had not recollected it in this present instance, nor even now am I able to say to you that it will be an alternative acceptable to the parties. But, gentlemen, if it were so, much that may happen to all of us may be avoided, much may be done to win the King's favor and permit us to stand where we have stood before. Let Sir Richard Escombe, then, say how it shall be. He is one of us, and would bring no unmerited misfortune upon this fraternity. The law permits him to go from this house with his honor unstained, a man among men, honored for

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his courage and his fidelity to our rules. Let him say if this be not enough. Let him agree with Lord Repton when the appointed time shall have come."

He spoke with real feeling, from his very heart. Let Medmenham Abbey be saved, and the old life might be resumed—the nights of fierce debauch; the days of slumber by the quiet river; the mad scenes of carousal on the roads; the coming and going of gallants; the music of women's voices. Oh, be sure Tobias was eloquent in the advocacy. The club! It was all he had in the world. And what had Richard Escombe, what had Kitty to say to him? Behold the sudden flash of color upon those pale and drooping cheeks. Watch the man as he stands irresolute, but turns upon Kitty such a burning glance that she cannot face it unabashed. His wife! Kitty Dulcimore his wife! And upon such a scene as this, in such an hour of victory! Oh, let Richard Escombe speak, for all the room wait for his words.

"I know not of your rule," he said, very quietly; "it is scarcely mine to speak of it. Let Miss Dulcimore say if she will help me to your alternative?"

"Nay," says Kitty, holding out both her arms, "you must help yourself, Sir Richard."

Tobias Cambray, lumbering down heavily from the rostrum, had still a word to say for his own character.

"Sir Richard Escombe," cries he, "though you may have forgotten the fact—and I'll not deny it is a fact that some will overlook even in such a house as this—I am still an ordained minister of the Church of England as by law established, and can do this office for ye as well as any in Buckinghamshire. Let it be done, and that, I take it, is a sufficient answer to His Majesty the King. There is yonder

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that which used to be the Chapel of the House. Let Lord Repton witness the ceremony with his own eyes, and he shall answer for it."

And then to Kitty, and speaking very quickly, he said:

"Lady, let your word be for this. I beg of you, in the name of all, help me to send the tidings to the King."

XLI

TOWARD THE HOUR OF SUNSET



IT was six o'clock by Medmenham Church when the Dragoons set out to return to Windsor; some ten minutes later when Kitty and Dick, riding the horses which Barry had found for them, followed after, without so much as a single question between them, one thought of their journey or its destination.

They were man and wife. In the old ruined chapel, before a crumbling altar of the ancient faith, Tobias Cambray had read the office and written the decree. With Lord Repton for witness, a troop of Dragoons to stand a guard of honor, the mischief had been done, the fatal words forever spoken. She was his wife—little Kitty Dulcimore whom he had loved from the beginning, who, as a child, had been all to him that the world had to give.

And was not this a thing worthy of Medmenham and its traditions. Many years must have passed since a man who loved a woman truly had entered that little chapel and declared his heart before God's altar. The day had been far distant when such a bride as Kitty Dulcimore had laid her hand upon a lover's arm and bent her head to willing submission.

Hereafter the tale might be told by many, but not by some of those who played so great a part in it. My lord,

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in truth, knew as well as any man that the Society of St. Francis was no more, its revels forever ended, its glory fallen. Carouse as the others would, in mock derision, the spirit of license had fled, the heart gone out of it. Even old Tobias could persuade no man to a second bottle when the work was done. The very servants fled from my lord's couch and left him to the chaplain's care—two who had contrived much and lost all; two keeping the vigil wearily through the long night and awakening to the truth—that this was the end, this the hour irrevocable.

They carried my lord to the house by Jordans the next day, and there the door shut upon the mystery of his life and of the mad woman who waited for him. Never again was it opened until his death. None had the curiosity to pry further into that sordid story or to ask what chapter of shame it opened anew. The man disappeared from that world wherein he had lived so ill—none lamenting him, his very name forgotten, his honors perishing with him.

Not even Tobias Cambray, minister of religion and Master of the Revels, found the old abbey any longer a haven or had any desire to revisit it. Tobias, indeed, quitted England within the month and took ship for America. There be some who say that a certain inn near Philadelphia, named first after George and then rechristened in honor of General Washington, was kept by an ex-parson with a fabulous habit of drinking and a mighty red nose.

This was not to be inquired into closely, for who is interested in any record that is not writ upon the roll at Medmenham, imperishable and forgotten?

Immaterial, indeed. Our place is upon the Windsor road, where Kitty and Dick ride side by side, they know not whither. An hour ago they were as very strangers in the

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formality of their talk, the ceremony of their greetings. Now he looks down proudly upon her and says that she is his wife.

Ah, figure of his dreams, his wife—the little Kitty of long ago, with the flaming cheeks and the pouting lips and the bluest of blue eyes! Kitty, whose curls ripple about her pretty forehead as wayward threads from a golden skein; whose hand lies so softly upon the bridle rein; whose little feet peep out beneath her petticoats, as though to hide them longer were a sin. And she is his wife! Neither protest of his love nor defence of his act shall be needed any longer. The House Infamous has spoken for him. He has taken the treasure of life therefrom and will guard it evermore. These were Richard Escombe's thoughts. But who would dare to speak of Kitty's?

Of what does a young girl think in these first sweet hours of her married life? Who shall read her heart aright? Kitty would have admitted to nothing serious. This great big man on the horse beside her, this fellow whose voice could be so musical in her ears, whose powerful hands caught hers as in a vise, whose eyes seemed to read her very heart, was he not the Dick Escombe who had been her playmate in the north, oh, so many years ago? Could she possibly be afraid of him? Odds' truth, the wooing had been strange enough, for never but upon that unhappy night at Sherbourn had Dick spoken openly to her of love; and here they were, knotted as truly as though a bench of bishops had done it and the Pope of Rome added his blessing. And they were riding demurely upon the road to Windsor, just as forgetful of those who belonged to them, of common duties and the common day, as Puck in a forest of the fairies.

Steal a glance at Kitty as she looks up from time to time

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and tries to appear as though she were entirely at her ease and had no special interest in this occasion or any other. They will have passed a mile along the road by this time, and have come in sight of Elizabeth's house. Here, properly, they should lie the night, and Kitty (though she dare not speak openly of it) would lead to the point by the woman's twisting road.

"You will be riding straight on to Windsor, Sir Richard?" she asked him, at last.

Dick looked up and perceived where they were.

"'Tis Marlow, surely, and your aunt's house. Was it at Marlow you left her, Kitty?"

"At Windsor, Sir Richard."

"Then at Windsor we will find her. Would ye be deserting the poor old lady, Kitty? A shame on the thought! Let's have the news of her and then ride on. 'Twill be dark before we see the castle walls. Ay, Kitty, you'd never wish to be riding in the dark after sunset—with such a rascal as Richard Escombe."

She changed color, but would deny him nothing. The servants at her aunt's house had no news whatever of Elizabeth. Their mistress was at Windsor still for aught they knew—nor were they in any way surprised that Kitty should be returning, though the kitchen had many a quip when the pair had set off. There was delay here, but for Kitty to get her own clothes and the horse she had always ridden.

"You would not have me play mine host's daughter any longer?" she said to him.

He told her that it mattered not.

"Am I not beholden to that same young lady to my life's end? 'Tis this very night I will hang a gold chain about

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her neck. Barry's gone forward to make all ready for us, Kitty. Ye'll not forget that some will be anxious about our comings and our goings—though, God knows, I care but little for what any man say of me. Let Repton make a tale for the King's ear, and, Kitty, they'll think we are lying at Marlow if we delay."

"That we are lying—"

"Would ye run away from me now, Kitty?"

She knew not how to answer him. This was a question she had begun to fear—and yet with a heart that warmed to her fear and wooed it. Just as he professed indifference, so did Kitty begin to perceive that all else was immaterial but his presence and his love. Not for all that the world could have given her, not for place or power or riches, would she have quitted Richard Escombe's side again. And yet she could hardly believe in the reality of his possession—that she was his own, and that Tobias Cambray had as surely robbed her of her freedom and her name as the King's bishop himself could have done.

Dusk had fallen while they were at Elizabeth's house. A fleece of misty clouds drifted up from the river and forced them to take the higher road. Here all the glory and warmth of an autumn evening solaced them. They went in good content through the quiet villages, speaking but rare words, and those somewhat inconsequent. When Dick's horse fell lame, and he must dismount to pull a nail from its shoe, Kitty was not sorry to rest. A sentinel of their good-fortune determined that it should be upon the border of a little mossy wood, remote and lonely and rich with its heritage of oaks. Hither, just as though it were already agreed between them, Dick led Kitty by the hand and sat a little while watching the falling shadows. A reluctance to return

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to the world of men and things came naturally to them both. They had lost a sense of time and space—the scene drew them together with a magnetism of atmosphere and circumstance irresistible. Who shall wonder that convention went to the winds now—nay, Dick had caught her to him and half blinded her by his kisses before any word was spoken there at all.

“My wife—my little wife!”

She trembled strangely—this little Kitty who had shown such courage an hour ago. How new a thing in her life—what a child of nature she had become to be sitting in this lonely wood at such a time, a lover’s arm about her, and all memory of yesterday, all thought for to-morrow clean gone from her head! Perhaps the very content of it perplexed her. Must they go hence presently, hear the wit and jest of friend and foe, move where houses and people made a world—return to the common day? Kitty could have desired a perpetual haven there amid the oaks. She listened to her lover as though he were a magician whose wand had conjured up such entrancements.

“And not six months gone since I came to Sherbourn. Kitty, will ye forget the night? Ah, what a night it was! And then the long ride afterward to London—just black darkness all the way and your words.”

“Dick, Dick, is it not forbidden—was it not the promise? What care I for Sherbourn, and why will you make me remember?”

“I’ll remember nothing but the little Kitty who came to save me this day—was there ever such music in a voice?—and me, ah, Kitty, wondering what I would say to the rogues and whose hand would take the pistol from me. D’ye see? There was a man as far from dying by his intention



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as Soldier George himself. And then, when he'd given it up, when he was saying that it must be because there was no other way, when the voice tells him 'no,' and your sweet self at the door! Ah, if an angel had come down to me!"

"There were those who found me no angel, Dick."

"Tell me how ye went to the King; tell me what he said to ye, Kitty."

She liked to speak of it, liked to tell him all that had befallen since the dreadful hour. Here was a story of which he knew little, and when she had finished he spoke of his own acts, of the coming of Honor Marwood to Windsor, of his journey to London, of the trick my lord had played him, not forgetting the house by Jordans and the dark secret it contained of my lord's son there imprisoned and shut from the world.

"And all the while," said he, closing his arms about her again and looking deep into her eyes—"and all the while 'twas my own little Kitty, sunshine or shadow, the Kitty I have loved. Will ye deny it, sweetheart? Will ye say it was not so? Whatever befell, ye were mine—ah, Kitty darling, 'tis music to hear ye, and I must be a beggar at your lips. Say 'twas so, and let me hear it that I may ask ye once more and you may answer me."

She responded as he wished. In the growing silence of the night, no sound upon their sighs but the rustle of a leaf or the murmur of a brook, the heaven of stars above them, the mossy glade for their bed, they told and retold the story, were reconciled and reconciled again in close embrace and lingering kiss. And then the talk of the future—all the promise and the hope of it.

"Ye see, Kitty," said he, "'tis little I have asked the King, and little, accordingly, I have received. There's no place

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for modesty in Court or Parliament. To him that will have and says so, to him shall it be given. I have learned to love Windsor, and would abide there if the King be willing. Let me go to him and say: 'You have no governor, but a man is known to me who would do you credit in the office.' I'll find my tongue if you bid me speak—and there's a woman's prerogative that she shall command us speak when, lacking her, we would be silent. I'll be made Governor of the Castle, and you shall make a home where a man may be proud to live. 'Tis but three hours' good riding to London and St. James's—not so distant, after all. Ay, and a man who serves the court is held to go in want of leisure above ordinary. We'll sail to Ireland in the summer, and away to the hill countries when the spring is coming. And, Kitty darling, ye shall ride Wild Rose, that won me the steeplechase; he shall be yours, for have not I so called him since the night they drew the lottery?"

"Dick, Dick! You must not speak of that—if you love me, Dick—"

"Faith, Kitty, and why should not I speak of it—would I have had the courage to tell ye, then, but for the paper the rogues put into my hands? And would not ye have been marrying my lord?"

She protested almost hotly. The quarrel was satisfying in its beginning and its ending. And what must follow upon it but a great spell of silence, and Kitty lying rosy and submissive in his arms, and the kindly night looking down upon their love. Let the past do its worst—the truth was this: that she was his wife, and that nothing under God's sky should rob him henceforth of her love.

And who shall charge them that they forget the hours? who make merry upon their oblivion? The story goes that

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it was midnight when they rode up to the inn at Windsor and asked for news of Elizabeth.

Ah, dear and saintly soul, Heaven be good to her! Elizabeth had realized the ultimate ambition of her life. She was sleeping within the castle walls. The King had heard of her situation and had summoned her. Elizabeth was crowned and in her glory. To her dying day would she speak of this.

XLII

WHICH IS SOMEWHAT IN THE OLDER FASHION



E have said that Elizabeth Dulcimore would boast of her visit to Windsor to the end of her days, but there seems to have been no necessity for any such vain talk.

As the story goes—and for this there is some authority in the private correspondence of the times—she took up her residence in the castle when Richard Escombe was made governor thereof—as he was within some six months of his marriage.

Soldier George always had more than a liking for the manly fellow who had served him so well and whose talk was so congenial. Whisper a word of glacis or enceinte to this King who could not speak English, and you had his ear in a moment. Escombe, it is said, devoted not a little of his leisure to the mastery of the German tongue. We can depict him poring over the dull book after nightfall—Kitty spelling out the great words with him, the pair of them as merry as a marriage-bell (which is just what they should have been) when the *gegegens* and the *gewordens* came ill to their lips. Never were such wonders of speech as those necessary to teach King George much of that art of war of which Richard Escombe was such a master. But the Irishman had a good head upon his shoulders, and be sure that

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if celestial tongues were ever to babble in German, pretty Kitty Escombe was the one to show them how it should be done.

They quarrelled, of course. There was hot blood in both their veins. Search the scandalous letters written by Lord Churchill to his friend, the fat fop Cunningham, and you will hear of Kitty riding half-way to London in a huff and Dick hunting her down as though she had been a fox. Once she left him for the best part of a day, and went to weep in Elizabeth's arms—that good soul being temporarily at the old house in Marlow. But these, after all, were but the sauce of marriage, and these two were devoted as man and wife rarely were in an age when marriage had become not a little unfashionable.

Sir Richard, in truth, loved his work, and a man who loves his work is rarely a bad husband. The old castle was the hub of the universe to him. He could almost tell you how many bricks there were in any particular wall, could certainly recount the history of any tower at which you might choose to point the finger. The years which found him governor were years of a military conservatism little to the liking of the dandies of the period. He would have nothing to do with schemes for building apartments here or new galleries there. Let every man carry his own blanket, was his motto, and sleep where fatigue had laid him down.

Perchance he would have been pleased enough if all those who must live at Windsor had been herded in the Great Keep, as their Norman forebears—a hardy garrison looking out across the marshes for an enemy. For Sir Dick was, above all else, a lover of romance, and romance has written much of his life.

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Kitty liked the castle well enough, for King George was much there, and many a merry revel warred upon the gloom of military circumstance. Twice every year they went for a brief period to St. James's. She visited her parents once a year, for these had now removed from Sherbourn to the old town of St. Albans, but Sir Dick could never suffer Clara Dulcimore long; and, indeed, that garrulous old lady quarrelled so violently with her husband's sister that the two were never permitted to remain in the castle together.

Of the soldiers we have known in these pages, little Ensign Willoughby interests us chiefly. Kitty's marriage seems to have been a terrible blow to him for at least six weeks. Thereafter he began to apply himself somewhat diligently to his profession and to the charms of the Lady Alice, Lord Churchill's sister, whom he married when he was twenty-seven. We hear of him subsequently, and after many years, with the great Lord Howe, where he played a brave enough part, and seems to have won the friendship of the Marquis de Lafayette. But he was always "Cousin Willoughby" to Kitty, who never tired of reminding him that he had been unfaithful to her, to which he would retort with an impudence worthy of an ensign.

For the rest, it is sad to hear that Captains Rupert and Beddoe, having sworn eternal friendship for the two hundred and fortieth time, met in a duel in Hyde Park and treated each other very brutally. For this and the somewhat disgraceful circumstances attending it they were dismissed the army, and went to live, as foster-brothers, in the city of Paris, where they preached a rousing Jacobitism to indifferent ears.

There are others to be named—chiefly Lord Churchill



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and the fat fop Cunningham, the Marquis of Repton and that poor-witted fellow Lord Ailsa. All these appear to have lived on the best of terms with Richard Escombe. In an age when the sword is the *arbiter elegans*, men quarrel often and are reconciled as quickly. The enemy of yesterday, whose honor could only be established by the blood which flowed upon an innocent sward, became to-day the firm friend who would die for his antagonist. None was readier to draw than Sir Richard, none quicker to sheathe the sword and cry: "'Tis a man I have loved as my own brother." So we find him hobnobbing with those who had looked on in that unforgotten hour of Kitty's humiliation. He had brought the author of it to his account; the others were forgiven.

Perhaps the attitude of the town helped Sir Dick in this. No doubt, had it not been for the King's favor and the ignominious termination of Harborne's conspiracy, Kitty would have suffered all that her aged lover meant her to suffer when he lured her to the club. Pamphleteers would have been busy, coffee-rooms all agog, the clubs resounding with the talk. But victory wins quickly upon the sympathies even of cynics—and the King's favor goes for so much. What otherwise might have been ruin became a social triumph. Bards sang of an heroic "brother" bringing an accursed society to light. Ministers preached from the pulpit upon the vices of the age and a woman's title to accuse them. The King himself honored Lady Escombe before many in his court. Tongue vied with tongue in paying her homage. The little Sister of St. Francis was a heroine indeed.

My Lord Harborne, it may be, knew nothing of this. It has been said that he retired to his house by Jordans,

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where Penn worshipped with the Quakers, and whose chapel stands to this day. Once, after many years, when Kitty and Dick were riding over to St. Albans to visit the Dulcimores, they passed by the house and stood a little while at the gates, while Sir Richard told her again of an eventful night, of the gypsies who had ridden after him, and the merry maid who had sent them up to the pursuit of the secret.

"What yon house could tell few will ever know," he said. "They spoke to me of a young wife who had been carried there, and, Kitty, 'twas you I thought they named. But I will not be the man's judge. If I were a son of his whose little glove I picked up from the table, let him answer as the occasion shall require. I can but hazard the truth. The cry which I heard was the cry of a woman who suffers more than mortal agony. Let me add nothing to the story which I cannot add of my knowledge. Perchance she was but a waiting wench gone mad of the monotony—I cannot tell you. But the child's glove lay upon the table, and I picked it up—to cast it at the man's feet when we stood face to face in Medmenham Abbey. But for that I do believe he would never have drawn sword upon me. And, Kitty, had he not done so, your Dick would have been a murderer. Oh, God knows, we suffered much together, but this gloomy house may well bid us remember that we are but the instruments and not the authors of eternal justice."

He doffed his hat reverently, and rode on with her. An English lane carried them presently by Jordans itself, where the Quakers had worshipped their God in remote solitudes, and whence William Penn had gone forth to the Americas. The beauty of the place, the stately trees girdling it about,

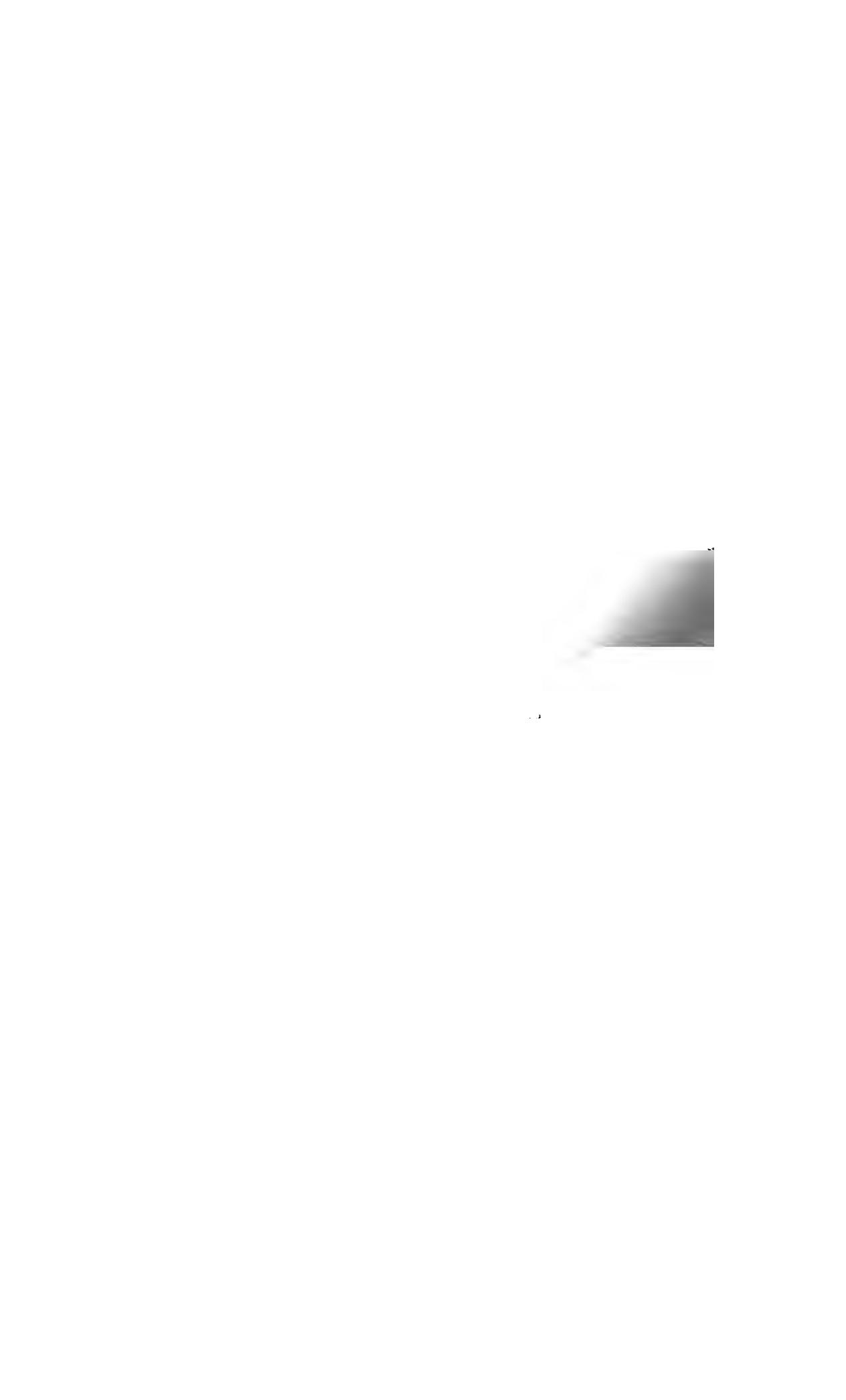


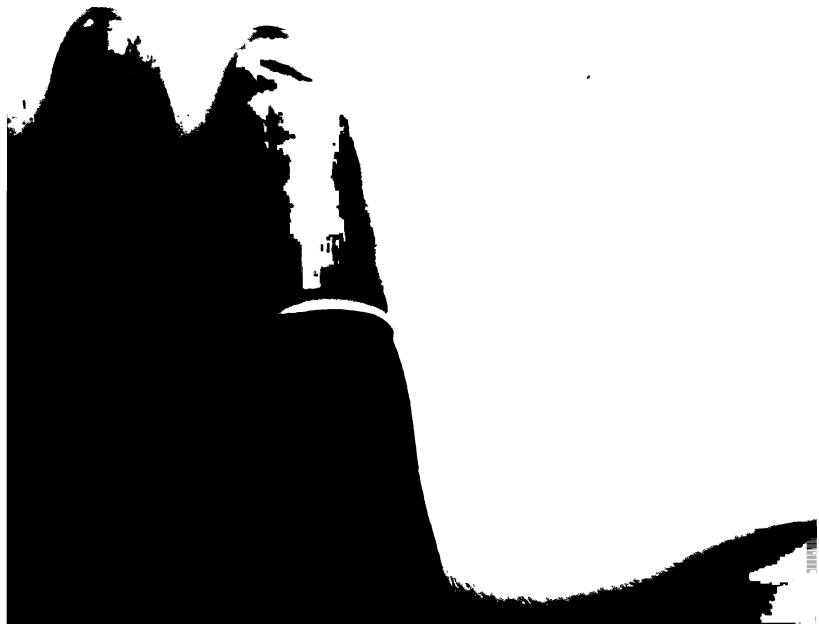
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the suggestion of a peace passing understanding, could not be without its influence upon those who passed by.

For here, as it were, at the very heart of rural England, was the first humble temple of a faith whose mighty cathedral across the seas should, in due time, summon the children of the earth.

THE END





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